

A MODEL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH USING THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY OF
" DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AS STARTING POINT

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Religion

by
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This dissertation, written by

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Theology at Claremont in partial fulfillment of the
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Men in the present day are experiencing simultaneous revolutions of such magnitude and variety as to defy any brief cataloging of their nature and extent. This truism needs no documentation. When each of these revolutions began, what their total effect upon civilization will be, and when we may expect their culminations are all moot questions. But upon the premise that ours is a "revolutionary age" all can agree.

One of the men who most dramatically called the twentieth century church to face up to the revolutionary character of our times was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. His pithy phrases such as "religionless Christianity" for a "world come of age" and metaphors of modern men as having "no ground beneath us" are intriguing still two decades after Bonhoeffer wrote them, as one observes the inexorable advance of urbanization and secularization. Bonhoeffer's theological work was not completed. In light of the fact that for many contemporary readers his most striking and compelling writings are those fragmentary ones of the imprisonment period, (which tend to be the most oft-quoted and, one suspects, the ones most Bonhoeffer students read) there is a grave risk that Bonhoeffer may be widely misunderstood even by some avid devotees. To compound the church's misfortune in the untimely termination of Bonhoeffer's career, he never gave concrete, functional images for the church structures which would embody a "religionless Christianity" to serve a "world come of age."

One can hardly survey the extant writings of Bonhoeffer, knowing as countless Christians do, of the remarkable witness of his own life and its culmination in martyrdom, without developing a conviction that had he but lived he would have been in the vanguard of those churchmen who are fostering the revolutions in the twentieth century church. Martin E. Marty points to the pervasive influence of Bonhoeffer by stating it as a "rule" that "introductions to study materials on revolution and change for the church in our generation--particularly student materials-- . . . must begin with a quotation by German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer."¹ Because he would have led the revolution, and especially since he was always searching for relevant concrete manifestations of all theologizing, one further assumes that Bonhoeffer would have been most helpful in offering functional images for a "religionless" Christian church.

Professor John D. Godsey says of Bonhoeffer: "He never had the opportunity to develop his thoughts about the relation of the world to Christ, but he points the way and challenges the church to finish the task!"² This paper is born of a conviction that Bonhoeffer has indeed "pointed the way," and that his theological writings and the example of his life decisions provide helpful bases for the construction of images and models of the contemporary church.

¹Martin E. Marty (ed.), No Ground Beneath Us (Nashville: National Methodist Student Movement, 1964), p. 9.

²John D. Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 268.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study is to survey the career of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a theologian and as a man deeply involved in the ambiguities of "living out" his theology under the most trying circumstances of the Nazi regime in Germany. Out of this study it is hoped that some guideposts will emerge that will point us toward a constructive approach to the task of imaging new forms of the institutional church that will take account of the realities of the "world come of age" and yet remain faithful to the content of the gospel message.

II. REASONS FOR THE STUDY

Just as the purpose of the study has a double thrust--a survey of Bonhoeffer's career and a proposal of a model for the church, using Bonhoeffer as a starting point--so are the reasons for this project twofold. First, some of the reasons for the selection of Bonhoeffer as theological mentor have already been suggested above, but others could be added. The testimony of eminent theologians to his importance is indeed impressive. Besides Marty and Godsey, one could list the seven prominent theologians who were contributors to a volume called The Place of Bonhoeffer.³ Bishop John A. T. Robinson's provocative book, Honest to God,⁴ featured Bonhoeffer prominently and created a sensation throughout the English-speaking church world. Many others could be

³Martin E. Marty (ed.), The Place of Bonhoeffer (New York: Association Press, 1962).

⁴John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (London: SCM Press, 1963).

added to the list. Even secular magazines such as Time⁵ and The New Yorker⁶ have featured extensive articles referring to Bonhoeffer in recent issues. Many non-churchmen have pursued Bonhoeffer's thought, though often they have been guilty, one suspects, of fatal selectivity.⁷ In short, one senses that his widespread appeal to contemporary observers reveals that his writings sound some vital and relevant notes on our present situation.

Another obvious appeal Bonhoeffer has for mankind today grows out of the impact of his willingness to face even martyrdom as the price of radical obedience. While there is a danger that we might be misled by that fact into a false idolatry of a "hero image," it is, on the other hand, difficult to miss the profundity of such commitment.

Yet more important to this study than either his popularity or his willingness to pay the supreme price for his personal commitment is the most unique position Bonhoeffer holds in the dialogue between "institutional religion" and "the secular world." Bonhoeffer centered his theology on the figure of Christ, but he always pointed to the church as the existing, visible body of Christ in the world. It is to the world that the church is in mission, demonstrating and proclaiming that Christ has reconciled it. Thus Bonhoeffer challenged the church

⁵"The 'God is Dead' Movement," Time, LXXXVI:17 (October 22, 1965), 61.

⁶Ved Mehta, "The New Theologian, III - Pastor Bonhoeffer," The New Yorker, XLI:41 (November 27, 1965), 65-169.

⁷Marty, The Place of Bonhoeffer, p. 26. Marty alludes here to some misinterpretations of Bonhoeffer by Marxists, secularists and humanist students of Bonhoeffer.

to find ways to address the world with the gospel--not to fight it off or attempt to squeeze it into ecclesiastical molds. As Godsey puts it:

In Bonhoeffer we have a theologian whose thought is as Christocentric as that of Karl Barth, who raised the question of the communication of the gospel as sharply as Rudolph Bultmann, who was led to take the problems of our pragmatic, problem-solving technological world as seriously as Reinhold Niebuhr, but who, more than any of these men, thought from the perspective of the concrete church. Not that these men are not church theologians, but Bonhoeffer somehow more consistently made the body of Christ the center of his concern and the terminus a quo of his thinking. He challenged the church to be the church by bringing into line its word and its act, its faith and order and its life and work. That which the church proclaims must take effect within the proclaiming community.⁸

His realistic appraisal of the advancing secularity of the world and his love for it, coupled with his loyalty and devotion to the church with which he chose to become involved even against family wishes give Bonhoeffer an excellent perspective from which to comment upon the relationship between church and world.

As to the second half of the project--the construction of a functional model for the contemporary church--the reasons for addressing this problem are practical. It was the genius of the Protestantism of early America that it could adapt itself to a frontier existence and be present to the people "where they were." But the revolution in the American life-style from the rural and pastoral mode to the urban and secular has created many problems for the church, which had become attached to an image of itself which--however appropriate to the needs of the nineteenth century it might have been--is simply

⁸Godsey, op. cit., p. 17.

inadequate for the twentieth century. In the frontier and rural patterns, individualism and parochialism may be quite appropriate; but ours is a time of urbanity where power speaks, and it requires corporate effort to accomplish our goals. Moreover, mass instantaneous world-wide communication has created a world in which a revolt in Africa or a nebulous query by a spokesman in Viet Nam can create a flurry of activity in our American economy that same day as reflected on the Stock Exchange. In a rural culture common sense and hard work are equipment enough to achieve one's goals, and anti-intellectualism is apt to be a common attitude. The urban man must be more sophisticated, his "common sense" much more complex, and to achieve his goals he must develop a high degree of intellectual accomplishment and expertise. In the rural scene, close family and personal ties are essential, and right and wrong are rather clearly defined as a gauge of individual conduct. Because of the mobility, the sheer press of numbers and the consequent relative anonymity, urban man's interpersonal relationships tend to be more diffused and his conduct less rigidly enforced by prevailing mores.

All of these descriptive generalizations are listed not to pass judgment on which way is "better." Church structures must be appropriate to the patterns of the age the church is serving. Yet much of our church life is still structured out of the parochial image which was appropriate to a former time, but to a large extent no longer applies--at least not in the same sense as formerly. Recent American church history has seen a proliferation of anti-church diagnoses. Some of the most scathing have come from churchmen themselves. This

is not intended to add to the scorn heaped upon the "church institutional," except to confess that there is much amiss in our churches and to search for constructive proposals for enhancing the relevance of church structures to serve the "new times" of urban, secular man.

This study is undertaken, then, to propose a model for the contemporary church which fits the mood and style of the urban, secular world. It is based upon the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer because it is believed that his theology offers a comprehensive base upon which to build a model. His passion for concreteness and relevance of the Christian revelation, for sociological insights and structures which will embody this concreteness, for an affirmative response to the maturity of the urban, secular world, for the continuity between the contemporary secular order and the biblical tradition, and his focus upon the person and work of Christ make Bonhoeffer a fitting mentor in a model-building task.

III. LIMITATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

The examination of Bonhoeffer's writings will be limited to those in English translation, for it is these which are most available to American readers and through which Bonhoeffer will exert most of his influence on the American church. His theology as such is not being critically evaluated here, since two excellent works⁹ on that subject are already available. Rather, this study will be limited to those aspects of his life and thought which have a bearing on his view

⁹Marty, The Place of Bonhoeffer, and Godsey, op. cit.

of the church.

Some of the terms used by Bonhoeffer--especially from the later period of his life--would bear some clarification. For the definitions of these, reliance has been placed mainly upon the insights of one of his closest friends, Eberhard Bethge, who was a student in the illegal Finkenwalde seminary conducted by Bonhoeffer during the Nazi suppression of non-cooperating churches. Most of the problematic terms hinge around Bonhoeffer's plea for what he calls "non-religious interpretations of biblical concepts" for a "world come of age."

A. Religion

First, an understanding of the term "religion" will help clarify what Bonhoeffer was rejecting with his renunciation of religion. According to Bethge's interpretation of Bonhoeffer, "religion means human activities to reach the beyond, the postulate of a deity in order to get help and protection if wanted."¹⁰ It is characterized 1) by individualism (with cultivation of individualistic forms of inwardness and abandonment of the world to itself); 2) by metaphysics (in which reality must be completed by the superstructure of a supernatural sphere); 3) by its relegation to a province or sector of the whole of life (which province is becoming smaller as it is driven into remoter areas by secularization); and 4) by the deus ex machina concept (providing answers, solutions and help to insoluble problems, which become

¹⁰Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," Chicago Theological Seminary Register, LI:2 (February, 1961), 33.

for mature man fewer and fewer).

Against this, Bonhoeffer calls for "Christianity without religion" or a "religionless Christianity." There are strands of this concept through most of his writings, all insisting upon the centrality of Christ to all of life, and not relegating faith to a formal sphere of ideal thought or ritual observance. But to be a man of faith does not mean to escape into some other realm to avoid the present world, even when the present appears to be without hope. So to be "in Christ" or "of the body of Christ" does not mean to "practice religion"--even the Christian religion! Religionless Christianity is the obedient faith of all who accept the call to discipleship--to involvement in Christ's being as "the man for others." Another quote from Bethge:

But who is Jesus? How is he real for us? Bonhoeffer wants to recheck the doctrinal shape of the churches in order to prove that Christ is precisely not all that which "religion" espouses. He is the man for others against individualistic inwardness. He is lonely and forsaken without transcendent escape. He worships not in provinciality but in the midst of real life. He, though longing for him, does not experience the deus ex machina. Thus the time for religion might have gone, but not the ¹¹ time for Jesus, or if you like, for the theologia crucis.

Bonhoeffer hoped to work out his views with a "non-religious interpretation of the biblical terms." In this he stands over-against much in the structure of our churches which still carry over in sermons and in practice much of the "religion" he rejected. Bethge agrees with Ebeling that it is first of all "christological interpretation," and says:

¹¹Ibid., p. 34.

Non-religious interpreting must do the opposite of what religious interpretation is doing: not making God the stopgap of our insufficiencies, not relating the world in its misfits to a deus ex machina, but respecting its adulthood. The churches must not fight for the wrong causes, their religious and "weltanschauliche" dressing, fight for something which is not the cause of Jesus. (As early as 1935 Bonhoeffer said: "Only those who cry for the Jews are allowed to sing Gregorian chants!")¹²

A caution is in order lest anyone be misled to think that "non-religious interpretation" involves the abandonment of church institutional structures. It does involve the creation of new forms and the translation of her terms into language and structures that fit the urban, secular context (this will have important implications for the "model" later), but if anything, the institutional structures will then be more important. In the words of Bethge:

It would be a great mistake to understand Bonhoeffer as abolishing the worshiping church and replacing service and sacrament by charity acts. The religionless world in itself is not Christianity. The church must not throw away its great terms "creation," "fall," "atonement," "repentance," "last things," and so on. But if she cannot relate them to the secularized world in such a way that their essence in worldly life can immediately be seen, then the church better keeps silent. Bonhoeffer himself worshiped and acted vicariously in anonymity and silence, and exactly this makes him speak loudly now to worldly life.¹³

B. This-worldliness

Another term used by Bonhoeffer to emphasize the concreteness and present relevance of the Christian message is "this-worldliness."

¹²Ibid., pp. 34-35.

¹³Ibid., p. 35.

According to Bethge, this is similar to what Bonhoeffer meant in the earlier writings by concreteness. But concreteness is not the "application" of some revelation previously "received." Rather, concreteness is an attribute of revelation itself, and unless the "application" is included, then it is not revelation. This-worldliness is therefore the concern of the Christian who sees that being in Christ is participating in the world, knowing that Christ guides him not beyond but into this daily human reality. As Bonhoeffer expresses it:

I should like to speak of God not on the borders of life but at its centre, not in weakness but in strength, not, therefore in man's suffering and death but in his life and prosperity. On the borders it seems to me better to hold our peace and leave the problem unsolved. Belief in the Resurrection is not the solution of the problem of death. The "beyond" of God is not the beyond of our perceptive faculties, the transcendence of theory based on perception has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is the "beyond in the midst of our life." The Church stands not where human powers give out, on the borders, but in the centre of the village.¹⁴

C. World Come of Age

Bonhoeffer also spoke of ours as a "world come of age." This phrase also reflects his contrast between faith and "religion." In a long letter,¹⁵ he sketches the history of man's discovery of the laws by which the world operates and his use of them to achieve his own autonomy. He notes that the more man is able to cope with the great questions, the less need he has for the "God-hypothesis" and for

¹⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 165f.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 194ff.

religion. The church has tried to forestall this movement and to prove to the world thus come of age that it cannot live without the tutelage of "God." But the more we oppose the trend, the more the movement itself is forced to see itself as un-Christian. Bonhoeffer opposes the attempt to force man to be falsely dependent, to exploit his weakness and to substitute for Christ himself one particular stage in the religiousness of man. Rather we must accept man as he is, that he has come of age, and point him to Christ in terms relevant to his own maturity.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapters II, III, and IV each covers a phase of Bonhoeffer's theological career. These phases have been delineated by Bethge, who has assumed the task of editing the Bonhoeffer papers. The chapter titles are taken from Bethge's designations of the periods as he ~~en~~unciated them in the Alden-Tuthill Lectures of the Chicago Theological Seminary in January, 1961.¹⁶

Chapter II, covering the period 1927-1933, will explore Bonhoeffer's early works, especially The Communion of Saints,¹⁷ and point to his attempts to reconcile sociological wisdom with dogmatic categories. This chapter will explicate some of his earlier views of

¹⁶Bethge, op. cit.

¹⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

the church, point to germinal concepts which hint at some of the later innovations in terminology, and will emphasize what appears to be more a continuity with his later work than a discontinuity.

Chapter III covers 1933-1940 and deals with the period when his writings were largely liturgical and exegetical. It is problematic for some interpreters because it represents a kind of withdrawal from the world which seems inconsistent with his former search for concreteness of revelation and his later radical involvement in the political order. This study demonstrates the mutual influence of Bonhoeffer's theology and his actions on one another. Chapter III suggests some forms of church order and discipline emerging in Bonhoeffer's life and thought during this "middle period" which help enable the body of Christ to enter the secular world with radical intentionality.

Chapter IV comes from the final period, 1940-1945. The writings of this period are both intriguing and fragmentary, but they offer germinal concepts and examples of "lived" theology which are helpful in the task of model-building. With his concentration on the problem of ethics, his focus on the figure of Christ and his ability to affirm secular man in the midst of the horror of the Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer offers in this period some new images and new hope for "being the church" even in a "religionless" age.

Chapter V will describe the proposed model of the church, using the classical image of the gathering and scattering of the People of God. But it will offer specific proposals for concrete forms of gathering that will meet some of Bonhoeffer's objection to "religion" in the church's worship and study, and strategies for scattering with

intentionality to be present in the secular world as the body of Christ. Finally, some suggestions for implementation of the model are offered. The stress is upon an ecumenical and non-parochial approach, but the proposals take account of the realities of present denominational structures and allow for working within them.

V. HISTORY AND STATUS OF THE PROBLEM

The place of the church in the social order has been a matter of much debate throughout our American history. With a few temporary and localized exceptions, we have never had an Established Church. Yet the churches exercised a great influence in the formative periods of our history. Churches often served as the center of social and communal life, and were looked to as the molders and defenders of values. In social concerns and philanthropy, American churches have had an impressive record. They pioneered in the establishment of schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, and various forms of social services. Most of this work was carried on through voluntary, cooperative (i.e., inter-denominational) "societies" ranging from foreign missionary societies to temperance unions. The impact of these activities of charity and concern has been strong, and churches have helped create and cultivate a sensitive conscience and a philanthropic spirit in our culture.

As the nation has grown, and changed from a rural agrarian to an urban and technological culture, the situation of the churches has also changed. However true it may be that the churches helped to create our society's norms which value education, health and welfare, the fact remains that they are no longer entirely capable of meeting

the society's needs in these areas--nor indeed do they have to, since government and public volunteer organizations have rightfully assumed responsibility in these fields. This is not to say the churches have no role in such services, nor to minimize the great work they are still carrying on. The point is rather that churches have proportionally less of these service roles to perform than they once did.

In terms of social life, it hardly needs to be said that most people today have far more opportunities for social activities than they can accept, and that church affairs, if not literally burdensome, are at best among many options for fellowship.

There have been innumerable critics of the church in the past several years who have pointed to her "failures." These criticisms have ranged all the way from accusations of irrelevance because churches were not involved enough in significant social and political struggles, to charges of ecclesiastical imperialism when churchmen--who identified themselves as such--would become involved in social and political struggles "where the church does not belong." Churchmen themselves have felt sufficiently ambiguous about their roles that they have often responded defensively to these charges. Many of the most scathing indictments have come from churchmen themselves, impatient for the church to declare her role.

Much of the confusion over the role of the church lies in the failure of the church's image of herself. At this point, the conflict between rural and urban life-styles and images appropriate to each come into focus again. Churchmen have been slow to recognize the shift, and even when their reflexes and sensitivities have been in the

direction of neighborly concern, they have often attempted to express their being as a church in terms of outmoded parochial structures which were basically hostile to the urban and secular world. Sensing this, but being unclear as to the exact nature of the problem, many have responded to the institution just as Bonhoeffer said they would. In the face of antiquated institutional structures, they have become anti-institutional, and many have counseled either the wrecking or the abandonment of the institutional church.

Similarly, churchmen have often responded despairingly and moralistically to urban and secular developments--equating them with "dehumanization"; and lacking the faith to see their great potential for good, the churches have failed to accept responsibility for the world's new science and technology as tools for "humanizing" the city.

Some healthy new trends seem to be emerging from the commentaries of churchmen relative to the new context in which we live. Gibson Winter's book, The New Creation as Metropolis,¹⁸ and Harvey Cox's The Secular City¹⁹ are examples of constructive analysis. While no extensive "review" of these works will be offered, they are representative of a new mood on the part of churchmen who see secularization and urbanization not as Antichrist, but affirm it as a gift of God and a logical outgrowth of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Such works are a step in the right direction toward affirming the city and assuming responsibility for it as the body of Christ. One exception

¹⁸Gibson Winter, The New Creation as Metropolis (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

¹⁹Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

would be taken with Harvey Cox, however, on his concept of creative disaffiliation²⁰ (from the church) as a way of assuming responsibility for the secular world. The model to be proposed below is born of a much more optimistic outlook upon the willingness of clergymen and laymen--more and more of whom are "secular men and women"--to be renewed as a church and to forge new structures growing out of images of what it is to be human in the twentieth century.

VI. SOURCES AND METHOD

Sources used in the present study include all the published English translations of Bonhoeffer's works and three secondary sources.²¹

For the "model," considerable use has been made of unpublished papers and personal contact with the personnel of the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago, Illinois. In fact, the image for the proposed model comes almost entirely from suggestions made by the Institute for updating structures and strategies of the church. This study of Bonhoeffer has led to the conclusion that this proposal fulfills his demand for concreteness and secular relevance. However, the writer must assume full responsibility for the uses made of the Institute faculty's witness, and nothing herein should be construed as having

²⁰Ibid., pp. 230ff.

²¹Godsey, op. cit.; Marty, The Place of Bonhoeffer; and Bethge, op. cit. Professor Godsey, of Drew Theological Seminary, is one of the foremost American commentators on Bonhoeffer. Marty et al. critique Bonhoeffer's theology in depth, and the Bethge citation refers to a full reprint of Bethge's Alden-Tuthill lectures at the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1961.

the endorsement of the Ecumenical Institute.

Finally, an unpublished paper by William Steel, pastor of the Woodland Hills, California Methodist Church for officials of that congregation entitled "A Functional View of the Church"²² has given some helpful ideas, as well as some encouragement that the implementation of such a model is feasible even within present denominational structures.

Library research, including the unpublished documents mentioned above, is the primary basis upon which this study is constructed. However, especially for Chapter V, personal participation in, and observation of, the effects of certain aspects of the program of the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago has added a dimension of confidence, not to say audacity, without which the study might have suffered even more from abstractions, and thus lost something in relevant concreteness. Also, some trial-and-error experience as a campus clergyman cannot but have had its effect upon some of the presuppositions and conclusions reflected in this work.

²²Infra., Appendix A.

CHAPTER II

FOUNDATION: THE QUEST FOR THE CONCRETE NATURE OF THE MESSAGE

THE EARLY BONHOEFFER: 1927-1933

Two characteristics are dominant in the early Bonhoeffer: the centrality of christology, and the quest for the concrete nature of the Christian message. The burden of this chapter will be to examine Bonhoeffer's early ecclesiology in which he shows that we need not be forced to choose between sociology and theology. Some of his earlier views of the church will be examined, and germinal concepts which hint at some of the later innovations in terminology will point up what appears to be more a continuity with his later work than a discontinuity.

I. CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCERN: REVELATION AS CONCRETION

Bonhoeffer gives heavy emphasis to the figure of the body of Christ in his articulation of a doctrine of the Church. This does not imply that he simply repeats dogmatic formulas of past great theologians. Rather, his relentless search is for concreteness that illuminates and embodies for contemporary man the meanings of historic articulations of Christian faith. The object of the present inquiry is Bonhoeffer's view of the church. Since the simple answer, that the church is the body of Christ (or the living embodiment of Christ's real presence in the world now), is still too abstract, the issue must be pressed to a further question of what exactly it means to be the

body of Christ.

Bonhoeffer focuses this question by directing his attention to the prior question of who Christ is. In fact, Marty, quoting from pages 121 and 122 of Bonhoeffer's Prisoner for God¹ selects this as the issue to which Bonhoeffer addressed himself:

You would be surprised and perhaps disturbed if you knew how my ideas on theology are taking shape. . . . The thing that keeps coming back to me is, what is Christianity, and indeed who is Christ for us today?²

This quotation, coming from late in Bonhoeffer's career (April 30, 1944), is chosen by Marty as the opening question for a study of Bonhoeffer. His rationale is helpful and instructive for setting a context for inquiry into Bonhoeffer's thought:

We ask the last question first, to keep it constantly before us. To place the letters [Bonhoeffer's] at the end involves the danger of distorting the question, exaggerating the discontinuity between the time when it was asked in the Church to the time when it was asked in the world.³

Having posited the "last question first," Marty then retraces Bonhoeffer's writing career to show how this question had permeated his thinking as he had examined various facets of Christian living:

In Sanctorum Communio, his first book, we shall see Bonhoeffer locating the question in the Church (instead of in the world as he was to do at the end). In Act and

¹Martin E. Marty (ed.), The Place of Bonhoeffer (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 25. Prisoner for God refers to an earlier publication under a different title of the book referred to in the present study as Letters and Papers from Prison.

²Martin E. Marty (ed.), The Place of Bonhoeffer (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 25.

³Ibid., pp. 25-26.

Being, his second, he was to locate the method of asking it in light of theologies of action and essence. In his career-long biblical exposition (The Cost of Discipleship and other writings) he was to find that the whole Scripture pressed Christ toward him as the concrete embodiment of the answer. In his decisive lectures on Christology this is made clear in systematic lineaments, however much they would be appraised in the last, "worldly" interpretation. In his liturgical and devotional works (such as Life Together) he would see the gathered, disciplined, retreating, inhaling, nurturing church gaining strength to carry the question and answer out into the unprotected world. Finally, in Ethics, he was to give the most concrete answers.⁴

The above paragraph is not only the order of the content of the book in which Marty and his colleagues evaluate Bonhoeffer's theology; it is also a chronology of the career of Bonhoeffer's question. Moreover, by seeing that his last question, "who is Christ for us today," is also his first, the continuities rather than the discontinuities in Bonhoeffer's thought are emphasized. By this approach the student has to quote Marty again, ". . . a place to stand to view the world and his world: and thus to prepare them for the real newness his last, daring, tentative, fragmentary, intuitive, exciting prison thoughts implied for us!"⁵ This continuity of Bonhoeffer's later writings with that of his earlier development is emphasized by Marty, et al., to combat the tendency of some Bonhoeffer interpreters to see a radical shift in the "later Bonhoeffer's" thought. Some of those Marty mentions who focus upon apparent discontinuities are: Marxists (Hanfried Müller and other East Zone Germans); the secularist interpretations (in many American student groups); the humanist interpretation (for which Bonhoeffer was scolded by, among others, Erich Müller-Gangloff

⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁵Ibid., p. 26.

and--in a way--Karl Barth).⁶

Another scholar who sees Bonhoeffer's thought as developing rather than shifting is John D. Godsey. He sees Bonhoeffer's Christocentric focus and his demand that revelation be concrete as the fundamental characteristics of his theology from the beginning. But it is Bonhoeffer's understanding of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which, according to Godsey, undergoes development, and this provides the real clue to the development within his theology itself.⁷ To describe this development, Godsey offers this approach:

At the risk of oversimplification, the writer would like to propose the following schema, which is presented in terms of an unfolding of Bonhoeffer's comprehension of Christology, as the proper guide to the three periods that are discernible in his theological development. During the first period his thought centered on Jesus Christ as the revelational reality of the church. During the second period his emphasis was upon Jesus Christ as the Lord over the church. In the third period Bonhoeffer concentrated his attention upon Jesus Christ as the Lord over the world. Of course, it must be admitted from the outset that all these aspects of Christology are to be found to some degree in each period, but the thesis here proposed has this twofold implication: first, that one of the aspects was dominant in each succeeding period and second, that each succeeding period represents an expansion of Bonhoeffer's Christological understanding. From this perspective we are able to view the striking contrast between his original emphasis on the church and his final emphasis on the world, not as a break in his theology, but as the two poles of a development.⁸

⁶Ibid.

⁷John D. Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 265.

⁸Ibid., pp. 265-66.

Eberhard Bethge, whose designators for the stages of Bonhoeffer's career stand as chapter headings in the present study, is probably the foremost authority on Bonhoeffer's life and thought. He says of these divisions:

The rather formalistic headings for these lectures--"Foundation," "Concentration," and "Liberation"--cover chronologically roughly the periods 1927-33, 1933-40, and 1940-45. Theologically these same periods might be called the dogmatic, the exegetical, and the ethical; or again, the theoretical period in which he learned and taught at Berlin University, the pastoral period in which he served the Confessing Church in a preacher's seminary and the political period in which his life became ambiguous.⁹

Although the present inquiry is limited to an attempt to elucidate Bonhoeffer's view of the church as a starting point for proposing a model for the church in the present time, the schemata of Marty, Godsey, and Bethge are all useful aids to an interpretation of the progress of his view of the church. If, as these commentators agree, Bonhoeffer's emphasis was upon the church at the beginning and upon the world at the end of his career, then this would be evidence that in his developing concept of the church he saw the church not only as an end in itself but also as a means by which those who are the body of Christ (i.e., the church) may fulfill Christ's ministry by serving the world as he did. The chronology outlined above has been adopted for the present work.

⁹Bethge, "The Challenge..." p. 3.

A. Christ as Norm of Revelation

Bonhoeffer's treatment of revelation is very closely related to his understanding of the person of Christ. For both he insists upon concrete expressions of what is meant by these terms. But a question which is prior even to this one deals with an understanding of concreteness itself. Here Bonhoeffer opposes any concept of revelation which splits it into a "delivery" of some ideal or image which then must be interpreted and "applied" to life. Concreteness is rather a genuine attribute of revelation itself. Bethge points out that revelation cannot be treated as though it were a more or less hidden treasure waiting for some "religious magician" to make it shiny and palatable. "There is no treasure at all," he says, "except the one which, on being discovered, at the same moment bursts with application by itself."¹⁰

This treatment of revelation which requires of it a concrete consequence as an essential attribute bears a resemblance to Bonhoeffer's positing of faith and obedience as dialectical and interchangeable terms later on (in The Cost of Discipleship), in which "faith" which does not eventuate in obedience is not genuine faith. Moreover, Bethge likens this understanding of the concreteness of revelation to Bonhoeffer's "this-worldliness" of the third phase of his career:

When he is most certainly and passionately longing and looking for the concrete nature of the message . . . he holds his eyes entirely on the revelation in Christ, in order to discover and describe its concreteness. Much later he calls it "this-worldliness." Concreteness is to

¹⁰Ibid., p. 7.

be understood not as an addition or second activity but as a genuine attribute of revelation itself.¹¹

B. Revelation Concretized in Social Relations

Bonhoeffer's theme of the concreteness of revelation was specifically carried into the sociological sphere. This is indicated by the subtitle of The Communion of Saints which is subtitled: "A Systematic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church." With this work he sought to employ the insights of sociology, as Troeltsch had done, to offer concrete descriptions of the historically-existing body, the church. But he sought to avoid Troeltsch's mistake of ignoring the significance for the church of its own faith-claims and the reality to which that faith points. Bethge describes this unique enterprise:

Troeltsch had unmasked the church by putting all his searchlights on its historico-sociological shapes and conditions--the non-theological factors. But Troeltsch soon became taboo with the theologians of revelation for his purely anthropological disposition. Bonhoeffer jumps in to handle the hot iron. He uses sociology for interpreting the shapes of this pretentious and mysterious body, the church. He brings together phenomenology and theology of revelation. But Bonhoeffer takes his stand within the church and rejects the possibility of grasping her sociological facts from the outside. Thus he tries to overcome the historico-sociological relativism. Our point here is that for Bonhoeffer revelation means nothing beyond, but an entity in, this historically and sociologically shaped world. Becoming and being a part of it belong to it essentially.¹²

¹¹Ibid. The comparison here of the treatment of concreteness with later developments in Bonhoeffer's thought is made not to get ahead of the sequential exposition of his thought, but only to anticipate the correlations which exist between earlier and later stages.

¹²Ibid., p. 8.

Therefore, for Bonhoeffer, we can and must think of revelation only in social relations. His concept of God finds concretion in the basic social relation, that of the "I-Thou." This is true because of the very nature of the encounter with a "Thou," for in one's decision to respond to the other as a "Thou" he sees disclosed the concrete action of God. In Bonhoeffer's own words:

No man can of himself make the other into an I, into a moral person conscious of responsibility. God, or the Holy Spirit, comes to the concrete Thou, only by his action does the other become a Thou for me, from which my I arises. In other words, every human Thou is an image of the divine Thou. The character of a Thou is in fact the form in which the divine is experienced....But since one man's becoming Thou for another does not in principle alter anything about the Thou as a person, it is not his person as an I that is holy, but the Thou of God, the absolute will, here visible in the concrete Thou of social life.¹³

Thus Bonhoeffer shifts the emphasis even of transcendence from a philosophical sphere to concrete "social" or "ethical" transcendence. God meets us in the Christ, the human "Thou." Even in his early writing, Bonhoeffer opposes any notion of revelation which originates in any philosophical idea of transcendence or metaphysics called God. Christ is the revelational reality of the church. This revelation is not something man can grasp for himself--it comes to him as a gift. But Bonhoeffer sees God's majesty safeguarded not in the beyond, but in the Christ "existing as the community of men." What this means concretely in the sociological sphere will be spelled out in the next section which explores further the concept of the sanctorum communio.

¹³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 36.

II. A SOCIOLOGICAL THEOLOGY OF THE SANCTORUM COMMUNIO

Two misunderstandings of the church are exposed by Bonhoeffer before stating a constructive view of it. The church, he says, is subject to two basic misunderstandings when either of two fundamental realities about its nature is overlooked.¹⁴ These realities are that it is on the one hand bound and located within history, and on the other, that it is established by God, and therefore rests on new basic ontic relationships. In order to clear the way for a constructive statement of what the church is, it is helpful first to expose the inadequacies of these two common misunderstandings.

The first misunderstanding is one of "historicizing." In such a misunderstanding, the church is confused with the religious community. This happens when one overlooks the character of reality possessed by the new fundamental relationships based on God and focuses instead on the 'religious motives' which, in fact, lead to empirical community (e.g., the urge to do missionary work, or the need to impart one's faith). To correct this view Bonhoeffer brings to bear the judgment of John 15:16: "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Bonhoeffer suggests that this misunderstanding is almost unavoidable in the study of the church from the historical or sociological point of view, and cautions that it is equally at home in the "religio-romantic circles of the Youth Movement."¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 87ff.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 88.

The second misunderstanding of the church is the "religious" one. This view confuses the church with the kingdom of God. It springs from not taking seriously the fact that man is bound by history. This failing is met with in theology, and may take the form of deifying history as an object (Roman Catholicism), or of evaluating history as accidental--subject to the law of sin and death. This, however, is not to accept God's will, but to circumvent it. For God wills to reveal everything in the church as he did in Christ--concealed in the guise of historical events.

Both misunderstandings are dangerous for they can be fed by solemn and earnest religious feeling. But neither grasps the reality of the church which is at once a historical community, and established by God. From these two facts emerges the Christian understanding of the church; and because of these two realities and the ontic relationships resulting therefrom, it is possible to judge the church only from within. As Bonhoeffer expresses it:

Upon the new basic ontic relationships there rests a communal being which, viewed from outside, cannot be characterized other than as a 'religious community.' Now it is certainly possible for us to confine ourselves to the empirical phenomenon 'church' qua 'religious community' or religious society, to analyze it as a 'corporation subject to the law applying to public bodies' and describe it in terms of sociological morphology. In this case all theological discussion of the subject would be superfluous. Or on the other hand--this is the second possibility--we can take the church's claim to be God's church seriously, when it regards the fact of Christ, or the 'Word,' as constitutive. This means, further, that we must look at the new basic relationships which we here presupposed, and which in the deepest sense make possible a social formation like the church. In this case one of our premises will of course no longer be susceptible to further justification, namely, that we take the claim of the church seriously, that is, not as

historically comprehensible, but as having its basis in the reality of God and his revelation. We do not want to bring standards for judging the church from outside; the church can be understood fully only from within itself, from within its own claim; only thus can we suitably acquire critical standards for judging it.¹⁶

After clarifying these two misunderstandings, Bonhoeffer then offers a constructive description of the church. In the choice between a consideration of the church either as an empirical phenomenon no different in principle from any other "religious fellowship" or as what it claims to be, namely, the church of God, established by God through his Word in Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer chooses the latter. For him, this understanding must be accepted or denied, and it is possible to judge the church only when one has accepted it as a revelational reality. That is, one finds the criterion for judging the church only within the church. Having accepted the church as a revelational reality, however, there are some ways of talking about what this reality is and how it manifests itself in history. There are various figures which could be employed to describe what the church is and what it does. In the three which have been selected for elaboration below, each one in some way implies all the others, but they are enumerated separately as a way of presenting Bonhoeffer's concepts in The Communion of Saints of what the church is and how it functions.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 88-89.

A. God's New Purpose for Men

One way to state what the church is is that it is "God's new purpose for men." This is not simply a "principle," but it is a realized historical fact. Bonhoeffer explains what he means in this way:

The church is God's new purpose for men. His will is always directed towards actual historical man, and therefore has its beginning in history. At some point in history it must become visible and comprehensible. But since the primal community, in which God speaks and the Word becomes deed and history through men, is rent asunder, now God himself must speak and act, and because his Word is always deed this means that he simultaneously accomplishes a new creation of men. Thus his will is at the same time fulfilled, that is, revealed. So just as the church has its beginning in Christ, so it is fulfilled in him. He is the cornerstone and foundation of the building, and the fullness of the church is his body.¹⁷

It is emphasized that it is our real humanity that is reconciled in Christ.

If we, the members of the Christian church, are to believe that God in Christ has reconciled us, the Christian church, with himself then in the Mediator of our reconciliation there must be combined not merely the love of God that reconciles, but at the same time the humanity that is to be reconciled, the humanity of the new Adam.¹⁸

Moreover, to ensure that the church, which is eternally realized in Christ, be actualized in history, the will of God must be continually realized anew--not as a general principle for all men, but in the personal appropriation of individuals. This actualization is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, by whose agency revelation not only apparently but really enters time.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 103

¹⁸Ibid.

In order to carry out the temporal building of the church as his community, God reveals himself as the Holy Spirit. The will of God which brings individual human beings together in the church maintains it, and is effectual only within it, is the Holy Spirit: and only by being personally appropriated by the Holy Spirit, by standing in the actual church, do we experience our election in the church, which is based on Christ.¹⁹

B. The Suffering Servant

Since the church is the revelational reality of God's will for man, and since God's will for man is realized in Christ, a second way of describing the church is to see it as a continuation of Christ's reconciling role, namely, the church is the suffering servant. In assuming this role, the church is seen as a collective person, acting in behalf of all mankind, just as Christ represents the "new man" or "new Adam." To show how Christ himself stands for the new humanity of reconciled man, Bonhoeffer says:

In Christ this tension between being isolated and being bound to others is really abolished. The thread between God and man which the first Adam severed is joined anew by God, by his revealing his love in Christ. He no longer demands and summons, approaching mankind purely as Thou; but gives himself as an I, opening his heart. The church is grounded in the revelation of the heart of God. But as, when primal communion with God restores the communion of mankind with himself, the community of men with each other is also re-established, in accordance with our proposition about the essential connection between man's communion with God and with his fellow-man.²⁰

Regarding how the church is seen fulfilling the role of suffering servant, Bonhoeffer points out that just as Christ vicariously and

¹⁹Ibid., p. 104.

²⁰Ibid., p. 106.

representationally assumed the guilt for our sins, so the church, as the continuation of the presence of Christ in history, represents the penance which mankind owes for individual and collective sin. Two brief quotations will point to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church as a collective person who vicariously continues Christ's work of representationally assuming mankind's guilt and thus reconciling man with his God against whom he has sinned:

'The mankind of sin' is one, even though it consists throughout of individuals; it is a collective person and yet subject to endless fragmentation; it is Adam, as every individual is both himself and Adam. This duality is its nature, annulled only by the unity of the new mankind in Christ.²¹

But because the whole of the new mankind is really established in Jesus Christ, he represents the whole history of mankind in his historical life. His history is qualified by the fact that in it the mankind of Adam is transformed into the mankind of Christ, by the fact that, as Jesus Christ's human body became the resurrection-body, so the corpus Adae became the corpus Christi. Each equally leads through death and resurrection; the human body, the corpus Adae, must be broken, so that the resurrection-body, the corpus Christi, might be created.²²

Thus it becomes clear in the church that the principle of Christ's activity is that of vicarious representation. Godsey summarizes Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ's role and of the church's continuation of His revelation:

The crucified and risen Christ is known by the church as the incarnate love of God to men, as the will of God for the renewal of the covenant, for instituting his reign, and therefore for fellowship.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 85.

²²Ibid., pp. 107-108.

²³Godsey, op. cit., p. 39.

As the continuation in history of the bearer of the Word of God for man, namely, that in Christ God reconciled man unto himself, the church is the servant of man, preserving the Word and bearing responsibility for its proclamation to all who would hear. This role the church does not create for itself. It is the assigned role of those who are called to be the church. But God himself accomplishes his will as he chooses through the Holy Spirit. The work which the Holy Spirit accomplishes is the work of Christ, being continued (actualized) in the concrete experience of persons who receive the word. Again, Godsey's summary is helpful:

The Spirit is able to work only through this word, which is the word of Christ himself. Christ is in the word; the Christ in whom the church is consummated woos the hearer's heart through the Spirit in order to bring him into his actualized community.²⁴

C. Church as Communion

Since the church is a collective of many members who, acting corporately, fulfill Christ's role as servant, a third way of referring to the church as a collective focuses on the members who form a communion. It is this image which provides the title, The Communion of Saints, and the elaboration of the characteristics of the "communion of saints" is the burden of the work.

Two concepts essential to Bonhoeffer's treatment of the sanctorum communio are those of collective person and of objective spirit. By the term collective person, Bonhoeffer points to the fact that man

²⁴Ibid., p. 40.

is never alone but always in community. Moreover, one can know his person only as he experiences it over-against some other person. For the Christian, the "other" represents a God-willed barrier, in meeting with whom one is placed in a state of ethical responsibility, that is, of decision. Thus the other becomes a "thou" by virtue of the fact that he represents a valid claim upon the one experiencing him, because every human thou is an image of the divine Thou. The basic social category then is the I-Thou relation. "Person" presupposes "fellowship." To recognize this is to see that "person," "fellowship" and "God" are inextricably related terms. By being confronted with the other, one is continually placed in the position of having to accept or reject the other, and his decision reflects also his decision about God. In any case, the individual belongs with the other, and they form (whatever its shape may take) a new social entity--the collective person.

It is not that many persons, coming together, add up to a collective person, but the person arises only through being imbedded in sociality. And when this happens, simultaneously the collective person arises, not before, yet not as a consequence of the arising of the individual.²⁵

Because the community is a collective person, it too has a will or spirit. This spirit is a separate entity from the individual members' spirits, yet it arises out of the wills of the members. The new entity thus comprised is the objective spirit of the community, and is dependent upon the strength and direction of the members' will. Since individuals may will with, alongside, or in opposition to one another,

²⁵Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 51.

the objective spirit is shaped by the resultant force and direction with which the individuals comprising it express their will.

The community of Israel was called to be God's people, and as a collective person it was constituted by his law. But Israel's history is full of their turning away to sin. In every man's sin, the sin of Adam is re-enacted. The reality of sin and the guilt it involves places every man in utmost loneliness through separation from God and man. In the fact of one's own sin and guilt, one can know that in him the whole of mankind has fallen. In every concrete bond of human fellowship, the reality of guilt is experienced. This is the history of man, that he is fallen and his bond with God and with other men is broken from the time of Adam. In Jesus Christ, however, the Christian discovers that this broken bond is joined anew. Around Jesus Christ Bonhoeffer sees the new community of those who have received his gift of reconciliation, breaking through the bonds of guilt incurred by man's transgression of the law. The sanctorum communio is not an association which one decides to join. It is the fellowship of those who have heard and received this message of reconciliation. It occurs when Christ, as the Word of God, breaks through man's isolation with the gift of God's love which he has made available by fulfilling the law and breaking the bond of guilt in which it places mankind.

Because Christ bears within him the new life principle of his church, he is the Lord of the church, that is, he is the ruler of the community which the church forms. The church must be seen then as a community, which rules out individualistic concepts of the church. Rather, membership in the church means membership in the community of

those who know that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Communion with God exists only through Christ, but Christ is present only in his church, hence there is communion with God only in the church. This fact destroys every individualistic conception of the church. The individual and the church are related in the following way: the Holy Spirit operates solely in the church as the communion of saints; thus each man who is apprehended by the Spirit must already be a part of that communion. No one, on the other hand, whom the Spirit has not yet apprehended can be in communion; whence it follows that the spirit, by the same act whereby he moves the elect, who are called into the communion established by Christ, brings them into the actual church. Entry into the church forms the basis for faith, just as faith forms the basis for entry.²⁶

D. A Dynamic of Being and Doing

In describing the church, then, various images may be used. But each one, though correctly used to illuminate a facet of the church's reality, may involve the risk of distortion unless it is seen in the total framework of a Christian understanding. Thus, to speak of the church as the revelational reality of God's new purpose for mankind is to focus on the being of the church; whereas, to refer to the church as the locus of the continuation in history of Christ's reconciling role as suffering servant, is to emphasize the doing of the church. In either mode of thought, the other reality must be borne in mind to avoid the errors of either the historicizing or the 'religious' misunderstanding. It is a mistake to view the church either as an empirical community of those in history who are religiously motivated, or as the Kingdom of God for those who have overcome the bondage to history. Similarly, in the image of the

²⁶Ibid., p. 116.

church as the communion of saints, the focus is neither on the "doing good" or the "being good" of the members. The church is the sanctorum communio by virtue of God's reign in it. Therefore the church is both a means to an end and an end in itself. It is the former because Christ, through the church, works for reconciling man into fellowship. It is the latter because it is precisely the fellowship which is thus realized that God himself wills.

The sanctorum communio is a fellowship or community of love. But Christian love is not a human possibility. It is only possible from faith in Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit. Love is grounded in obedience to the word of Christ. Since the church is "Christ existing as community," there are concrete social actions which grow out of its fellowship of love. Godsey summarizes them briefly under two types:

Bonhoeffer characterizes the concrete social actions that constitute the fellowship of love as, first, the God-established structural togetherness (Miteinander) of church and church member and second, the daily ministration (Füreinander) of the members and the principle of vicariousness. The first means that the Christian community is so structured by God that it lives one life; where one of its members is, there is the whole church in its power, namely, in the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The second refers to concrete acts of love that take place in the community, and Bonhoeffer lists three positive possibilities of how Christians may actualize their love for one another: self-denying, active work for one's neighbor, intercessory prayer, and mutual granting of the forgiveness of sins in the name of God.²⁷

All of the images of being and doing may now be seen as included in the concept of the church as the body of Christ. As Bonhoeffer

²⁷Godsey, op. cit., p. 42.

states it:

If we now look at the church not in terms of how it is built up, but as a unified reality, then the image of the body of Christ must dominate. What does this really mean? In the church Christ is at work as with an instrument. He is present in it; as the Holy Spirit is with the individual, so Christ makes himself present in the congregation of the saints. If we take the thought of the body seriously, then it means that this 'image' identifies Christ and the church, as Paul himself clearly does (I Cor. 12:12, 6:5).²⁸

One additional clarification is needed lest the body of Christ image and the concept of the church's unity of spirit be taken as implying the domination of individual spirits by the objective spirit or the pressing of members into some kind of uniformity. Godsey states the distinction between unity and uniformity:

Unity of Spirit in the church means that God has sovereignly established a unity of the church and considers it as a collective person: "Christ existing as a community" or "Christ existing as the church" (Christus als Gemeinde existierend). This God-willed original synthesis, which is not visible to the eye, should not be confused with harmony or agreement or affinity of souls or even equality. In fact, says Bonhoeffer, the unity is often strongest exactly where the conflict of will is greatest, where dissimilarities are most pronounced! The decisive New Testament texts do not say: one theology and one rite, one opinion in all public and private matters and one standard of life, but: one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all...--not ideal, but real unity, not "agreement in the Spirit" but "unity of the Spirit." However, this unity in which God looks on the multiplicity of persons as collective person in no way abolishes the individuality and the fellowship of persons; on the contrary, unity, fellowship and multiplicity of the Spirit belong together in the church.²⁹

²⁸Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 99f. ²⁹Godsey, op. cit., pp. 43f.

III. THE BODY OF CHRIST: A FUNCTIONAL VIEW

The empirical community which we know as the church has in common with all other social institutions certain characteristics of location in time and space, assembly of members, legal constitutions and benefits bestowed with membership. It is therefore possible to suppose that it can be analyzed sociologically as a "religious" type of community among many other types of communities. Such thinking is mistaken, according to Bonhoeffer, for it overlooks the fact that the church--in spite of the relativity of its forms and its imperfect and unpretentious appearance--is nevertheless the body of Christ, the presence of Christ on earth, for it has his Word. For this reason, Bonhoeffer asserts that it is possible to understand the empirical church only by looking down from above or by looking out from the inside. Since the historical church claims that it possesses the Holy Spirit and is custodian of the Word of God and of the sacrament, the question arises as to what the relationship is of the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit of the sanctorum communio to the objective spirit of the empirical church.

The pervasive fact of sin forbids that we identify the objective spirit of even Christian empirical religious communities with the Spirit of Christ present in his church. Not only individual wills, but also the objective spirit of the congregation is tainted by and liable to sin and error. Yet the Spirit of Christ does not relate itself to the objective spirit of the church. Godsey, in a paragraph, crystallizes not only the nature of this relationship but also the

concrete forms in which it is expressed:

What then, is the positive relationship? Bonhoeffer explains it in terms of function. Christ and the Holy Spirit use the historically given forms of the objective spiritual life in the upbuilding of the empirical church: the historical tendency of the Christ-Spirit works in the form of the objective spirit, and the Holy Spirit uses the objective spirit as the bearer of his social activity. But both confirm their presence to the church solely through the word, which means that the ever-changing, imperfect, sinful objective spirit of a human "religious fellowship" must believe that it is the church, "Christ existing as community," sanctorum communio! The identity cannot be confirmed historically and will remain invisible until the eschata (sic). Yet a beginning has already been made, in that the Holy Spirit uses the objective spirit as the bearer of certain visible forms that he himself guarantees to be efficacious. These forms are preaching and the administration of the sacrament.³⁰

These conclusions have a bearing upon the forms of the church which occur tangibly in the local congregation. The church is the agency through which the Spirit of Christ accomplishes his purposes in history. It follows that what goes on in the empirical church must include those activities through which the Spirit may be present and effective in the Word and the sacraments. There must then be a congregation to receive this Word and sacrament. Again this exposes as erroneous any individualistic notion of the church which sees the congregation merely as a manifestation of the individual believer's need for a means of expressing his faith. Rather, preaching the Word is something the church has as its function, and to belong to the church means to place oneself in the context in which the Word is proclaimed and made effective. In principle, the church in the sense of the

³⁰Ibid., p. 45.

congregation is not "necessary to salvation." Invalids and castaways may belong to the body of Christ. But one cannot say he is a member of the church, whose mission it is to bear the Word through which Christ makes himself present, and then voluntarily withdraw or remain aloof from the community in which the proclamation is made.

The empirical church is made up of three concentric circles, sociologically speaking. First, all those who are baptised are included as those who are possible members of the church. Since baptism requires faith and a child being baptized does not yet have faith, it is the objective spirit of the congregation which receives the sacrament in faith for the child. But this faith involves the stipulation that the child must remain in the Christian church. The second (smaller) circle is composed of those who do assemble for the hearing of the word. Within this latter circle there is a third (smallest) circle of those who, in obedient response to the word, receive the gift of the sacrament of Holy Communion. But this receiving of the sacrament does not bring the church into being. Rather, their gathering to hear the Word is the occasion of the coming into being of the church. Holy Communion is the expression of their decision with respect to the Word. As Bonhoeffer states it:

This free gathering to eat from the table of the altar is not free but obedient symbolism, which means that divine action is assured. This obedient symbolizing on the part of a congregation gathered of its own free will is what distinguishes it from the congregation where preaching takes place. The decision brought about by preaching now becomes a visible action, a profession of faith not only in God's grace, but in his holy church. Thus the congregation where preaching takes place is a necessary presupposition of the congregation in which the sacrament is celebrated, and the latter, as a fellowship of those professing their faith,

is by its very nature smaller than the former. It is therefore not the case, as is often supposed, that the congregation for the sacrament brings the church into existence. It is the preaching of the Word which does this; the decisive factor is that the church now bears witness in a way visible to all, acting obediently and symbolically, and that God acknowledges it as such in visible fashion.³¹

In regard to the "concentric circles," Bonhoeffer cautions against setting up small groups of members either within or outside the church--especially for the sacrament--and assuming thereby that we develop the church within the church. Such procedure tends either overtly or subtly to equate this 'church within the church' and the 'true church.' In fact, it leads to factions, and those who do it with Luther as their warrant misunderstand his intent. Luther was speaking only of serious-minded Christians meeting together, who nevertheless are merely visible expressions of the empirical church and by no means a purer form of the sanctorum communio.

With respect to one another, the members of the church have a unique relationship in the care of souls. Growing out of the understanding of the church he has already developed, Bonhoeffer now points to the double role members have in the care of souls. One is the priestly function--given to every member as a member--of hearing confession, forgiving sin, proclaiming the Word, all of which he does with the authority of the church. But a second, "counselling" function is also called for of men in society, by which they help one another in important decisions. These functions must be carefully

³¹Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 169.

distinguished. In the one, a brother has absolute significance for one's life, deriving from an understanding of the church and his role in it. In the other, the brother has a relative (though important) significance, deriving from our historicity. Even though each man standing before God must decide for himself alone what he must do, yet it would be foolhardy not to make use of the gift God has given him of the neighbor who is also a believer and whose counsel might be just the needed corrective for one's own history of past sins growing out of erroneous judgment.

Within the empirical church there is also an absolute and relative authority. The absolute authority is the Word of God, which demands absolute obedience, i.e., absolute freedom. But since the word of the church has as its norm the Word of God by which it 'directs itself,' the church has relative authority and demands relative obedience, i.e., relative freedom. Bonhoeffer recognizes that speaking of the authority of the church will sound irksome and un-Protestant to some--a threat to the freedom of conscience. Yet the acknowledgment of the church's relative authority preserves the gospel from various forms of fanaticism when individual consciences tend to become narrow and over-zealous. The church's authority grows out of its responsibility to speak faithfully--especially to all points connected with preserving the purity of the word, but also on matters in world affairs.

Bonhoeffer has opened the way for an understanding of the sociological nature of the church which nevertheless takes seriously

its claim of being grounded in revelation. It preserves the individuality of persons and, at the same time, allows for a recovery of the corporate nature of the Christian community. Revelation itself is manifested in concrete historical contexts, and social applicability is a characteristic of revelation. The person of Jesus Christ is the norm by which the church tests its institutional expression. The function of the church is to represent in history the continuing presence of Christ. This the church does by faith, and apart from faith there are no valid criteria by which to judge the validity of the church's being as the body of Christ.

CHAPTER III

CONCENTRATION: THE NARROW PASS FOR CHRISTIANITY

THE MIDDLE PERIOD: 1933-1940

The period covered by this chapter appears to some to represent a "detour" in Bonhoeffer's development. His early works sought for utter concreteness of the Gospel revelation, and his later works were the most explicit of all in urging Christians forth into radical involvement in the secular world. Yet here, we find him restoring a "medieval" image of monasticism, and dropping the development of his fruitful theme of Christ's Lordship over the world (to which he later returned) just as he had launched it.

Eberhard Bethge sees this phase as Bonhoeffer's response to the nationalistic wave inundating Germany at that time. For him to have spoken of the state positively--though theologically correct--would have been to feed incense on the Nazi altar. This was rather a time for the church to display its concreteness in its "otherness."

For the present study, this period is significant not only for its demonstration of theologizing appropriate to concrete situations, but also for its disclosure of forms of church order and discipline which set its members free from an image of themselves as "victims" even in the most severe circumstances, allowing them to live their discipleship joyfully. This kind of "secret discipline" becomes a helpful preparation for entering the secular world with radical intentionality to address secular man in concrete terms with the Gospel.

This chapter draws mainly upon the two major works of Bonhoeffer from this period, The Cost of Discipleship¹ and Life Together,² plus secondary sources previously cited. In this period one can see some of the effects of events on Bonhoeffer's theology, and how his theology and his life decisions affected each other. This can be illustrated by his role in the German Church struggle and his participation in the Confessing Church, in his trips outside of Germany, and in his return to lead the Finkenwalde seminary and Bruderhaus. Theologically, this chapter examines the christological aspects of Cost of Discipleship, a book of biblical exegesis, the dialectic of faith and obedience, and the arcanum, or "secret discipline," as a source of a Christian's strength for his role in the world.

I. CHRISTOLOGY: GRACE AS COSTLY

Addressing the question of what from The Cost of Discipleship is from an earlier period and what is new, Bethge states that the actual work on the book, published in 1937, was started in 1933-34 with meditations and preaching on the Sermon on the Mount. Alluding to a 1928 address, Bethge observes that at that time, Bonhoeffer was still using traditional Lutheran interpretation to escape the directness of the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that a literal understanding makes it law, and the law is abolished in Christ. But in 1930-31 Bonhoeffer had

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship Rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954).

spent a year in the New World (as a fellow at Union Theological Seminary, New York), and Bethge sees this experience and the encounter with the social gospel as a stimulus for facing again the Sermon on the Mount. Bethge admits that the theology underlying the American version of the social gospel did not impress Bonhoeffer (a quick survey of Bonhoeffer's "report"³ of his year at Union will bear this out!), but affirms that its actualization did leave marks on him, giving rise in full force of the question of faith and obedience. Says Bethge:

In his lectures he dealt with it in terms which come very close to his later terminology. Other foreshadowings are to be found in his theological evaluation of the child at the end of Act and Being, in the long treatment of the innocent simplicity of the believer and the bedeviled nature of reflection in Creation and Fall. Finally, there exists a Bible study in student notes in 1932 where the nucleus of Bonhoeffer's characteristic terms appears: faith is true only in the concrete following of Jesus. Here in 1932 we trace for the first time the challenging terms of "cheap and costly grace."⁴

Cost of Discipleship is important, then, because it represents Bonhoeffer's first unfolding of the christological concept. As such, it is continuous with the former period in which he had dealt so heavily with ecclesiology, making the body of Christ the dominant image and the figure of Jesus Christ as Lord the central revelational reality of the church. But the concrete meaning of Christ for the contemporary church (and for the contemporary world!) could not be a diluted message

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 86-118.

⁴Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," Chicago Theological Seminary Register, LI:2 (February, 1961), 17.

which simply baptized the "is." Rather, it must take account of the radical demands of even the Sermon on the Mount as an illustration of the limits to which Christ might send any who would answer faithfully his call to discipleship.

Having noted the continuity between this and Bonhoeffer's earlier period, Bethge does acknowledge that there are, nevertheless, certain new dimensions of his thought in this time which undoubtedly is influenced by current events in the Germany of his day. He was one of the first and most passionate members of the opposition to the Nazi-controlled "German Christian" church. He helped draft some of the resolutions denouncing it as heretical, he endorsed the Barmen Council which formed a part of the organized opposition, namely, the Confessing Church, and he became a servant of that church as teacher, ecumenical representative, and courier until his eventual imprisonment in 1943.

The christological theme of "cheap" versus "costly" grace grows, therefore, out of previous struggles for the concrete nature of the gospel message and the "answer" to the quest in Jesus Christ. But the impact of historical events promoted an energetic exclusiveness of the theme. Whereas earlier he had introduced the theme of Christ's Lordship over the world, now he dropped it, for it sounded too closely related to the Nazi boasts of divine sanction for their nationalistic mania. In relationship to the state, he dropped his clever notion of the "orders of preservation" just when, according to Bethge, some prominent Lutherans (e.g., Kunneth) were taking it up. Similarly, he lost interest in discussing the doctrine of "orders of creation," not because that theological task was finished, but because to do it

correctly, and however seriously, was to allow a proper place for the state, and would have implicitly given fuel to the Nazi self-idolatry. Instead, Bonhoeffer became contemptuously silent on the question of a theology of creation and turned instead to an eschatological theme--a "theology of breaking through" orders and creation. For Bonhoeffer, clinging to the concreteness of the message for this time was the opposite of Luther's task of making statements about world, state and creation. Rather, this was a time for emphasizing the concreteness of the message in its "otherness." This meant concretely, for example, the disavowal of any privileges or compromises with an evil state (as in accepting the "Aryan clause" as the German Christians had done) under a rationalization that by accepting small compromises the church could retain a hearing before the masses. Rather than accept such reasoning, Bonhoeffer's insistence on the "costliness" of grace could lead him to write in 1933: "Now back into the small conventicles!"⁵

Before proceeding with a further examination of "costly grace" under the faith-obedience dialectic in the next section, one further word needs to be added to offset any impression that even in this period "otherness" could mean for Bonhoeffer a pietistic or mystical separation from involvement. Bethge sees it this way:

The world becomes the threatening jungle which must be passed. The world has not disappeared, it is not suspended; on the contrary, the world rules. But with Bonhoeffer there can be no Weltflucht ("withdrawal from the world"). This would be a gross misinterpretation. Discipleship is all call for fight. Bonhoeffer's ghetto of discipleship is precisely not the peaceful corner of the

⁵Ibid., p. 16.

pietist or the beyond of the enthusiast, both being disloyal to the earth. On the contrary it is all attack, for no other reason than to save the creative openness and earthly width of the message.⁶

Thus, even in the new turn of this period there is a prevailing consistency with his former work. It is not merely a formal and logical relationship with previous theological effort, but a synthesizing between formal theology and a sensitive perceptiveness of the challenges to theology of the events of his day. One prominent aspect of this kind of "practical theology" for Bonhoeffer's concept of "costly grace" was the problem of the relationship of faith and obedience.

II. FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Bonhoeffer's major work of the middle period was The Cost of Discipleship (the English rendition of Nachfolge--"following after," or "discipleship"). On the theme of discipleship, he continues his search for concreteness--this time, of the concreteness of faith. He was searching for a way to recover the Reformers' misused term, "faith," as the reality of the incarnate, present in faith, which means visibility and involvement in history. He writes in the opening pages:

When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate mankind from all man-made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience. If they follow Jesus, men escape from the hard yoke of their own laws, and submit to the kindly yoke of Jesus Christ. But does this mean that we ignore the seriousness of his commands? Far from it. We can only achieve perfect liberty

⁶Ibid., p. 18.

and enjoy fellowship with Jesus when his command, his call to absolute discipleship, is appreciated in its entirety. Only the man who follows the command of Jesus single-mindedly, and unresistingly lets his yoke rest upon him, finds his burden easy, and under its gentle pressure receives the power to persevere in the right way.⁷

This opens Bonhoeffer's attack upon "cheap grace" and his distinction between it and genuine or "costly" grace. Cheap grace is making cheapjack's wares out of the sacraments, forgiveness of sins, and the consolations of religion and throwing them away at cut prices. It makes grace a doctrine, a principle, a system in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed as a general truth growing out of a 'conception' of the love of God. Intellectual assent to such an idea is held to be sufficient for the remission of sins. In short, it means the justification of sins without the justification of the sinner, and for that reason, it is heresy.

Costly grace, on the other hand, may not be "thrown to the dogs" in such a way. It is the hidden treasure for which one will sell all he has to buy it; the kingly rule of Christ for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; the call of Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Moreover, says Bonhoeffer:

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: 'Ye were bought at a price,' and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all,

⁷Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 31.

it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.⁸

By his insistence upon the costliness of grace, Bonhoeffer is not setting aside Luther's great theme of sola fide, sola gratia, but he is attempting to recover it by restoring its concreteness. It was a fatal misunderstanding of Luther by his successors when they began to take his rediscovery of the gospel of pure grace as a general dispensation from obedience to the command of Jesus, or when they used it to confer automatically both righteousness and holiness upon the world. A subtle change of emphasis is all it takes to destroy Luther's perception. Out of his own misery, Luther learned to grasp by faith the free and unconditional forgiveness of all his sins--for he knew that man cannot stand before God, because no matter how religious his works and ways may be, he is at bottom always seeking his own interest. But this experience taught him that this grace had cost him his very life, and must continue to cost him his life day by day. Thus grace did not dispense with the need for discipleship, but made him a more earnest disciple; and when Luther spoke of grace, he implied a corollary of absolute obedience to Christ. But we see the progressive degeneration of this insight in Bonhoeffer's characterization: "Luther had said that grace alone can save; his followers took up his doctrine and repeated it word for word. But they left out its invariable corollary, the obligation of discipleship."⁹

⁸Ibid., p. 37.

⁹Ibid., p. 41.

The problem, says Bonhoeffer, is that we have misused Luther's formula by treating it as one of the data with which we enter life-- thus all our sins are forgiven in advance, and any distinctions between Christian and pagan behavior are, for all practical purposes removed. But for Luther, it was the answer to a sum, arrived at by God, and not by his own effort. Thus the acceptance of God's "sum" is the final, radical breach with the besetting sin of attempting to earn one's justification--but that sin is not thereby justified; only the sinner who receives his forgiveness in faith is! Bonhoeffer, following Kierkegaard, likens the misuse of Luther's perception to the misuse of Faust's. At the end of a life spent in the pursuit of knowledge, Faust confesses: 'I now do see that we can nothing know.' After long experience one can make such an observation as a conclusion. But it is entirely a different matter when a freshman at the university seeks to use this conclusion as an excuse for indolence!

Genuine grace is, therefore, the "costly grace" of concrete discipleship, or the following of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is the obedient response on the part of individuals to the call of Jesus. By an exegesis of the biblical accounts of the calling of the original disciples, Bonhoeffer points out that their response was an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus. Thus the disciples' response simply witnesses to the fact that they recognized in the call itself Jesus' authority to command obedience. Thus there is no separation in time of faith and obedience. In recognizing the call of Jesus, the disciple recognizes the command to obey; and in his obedient response, he testifies to his faith that it is Jesus who calls. It may

be seen from this that faith and obedience imply each other, and that mere intellectual assent to an idea is not "faith" any more than striving after religious principles or doing good works to "earn" one's justification is "obedience." Stated positively, we have the theme of this section of the book in Bonhoeffer's dialectic of faith and obedience: "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes."¹⁰

Although discipleship is an individual response, the concept of discipleship as faith, in reality is not meant to weaken but to confirm the claim of the social essence of each of the Christian dogmas. Bonhoeffer makes this clear in the following statement:

No one can become a new man except by entering the church and becoming a member of the Body of Christ. It is impossible to become a new man as a solitary individual. The new man means more than the individual believer after he has been justified and sanctified. It means the Church, the Body of Christ, in fact it means Christ himself.¹¹

On the other hand, no individual can hide in the masses to escape the command upon his own life to obey. Each preserves his separate identity and function. Bethge points out that in Bonhoeffer, individual discipleship and individualism exclude each other. Bethge also points out that Bonhoeffer's later notion of "religion" (which he rejects) as individualism in the Letters is fully in line with this emphasis on the individual.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 54.

¹¹Ibid., p. 218.

¹²Bethge, op. cit., p. 20.

Discipleship is fundamentally different from any ideal or ideology. Jesus' call cannot be recoinced into a program. As Bonhoeffer says: "Rather it is the exact opposite of all legality. It is nothing else than bondage to Jesus Christ alone, completely breaking through every programme, every ideal, every set of laws."¹³ The step into discipleship breaks through all casuistic and legalistic programs. It neither attempts to elevate to universal 'principles' the commands of Jesus nor seeks casuistically to evade their directness. Rather, it accepts the new existence created by the call and the new relations established by it. The word is, in fact, weaker than an ideology; likewise, the disciple is weaker than the propagandist of an ideology, for neither the gospel nor its true witnesses attempt to override the obstacles it meets. In a passage which gives a foretaste of the later Bonhoeffer, he says:

The word is weaker than any ideology, and this means that with only the gospel at their command the witnesses are weaker than the propagandists of an opinion. But although they are weak, they are ready to suffer with the Word and so are free from that morbid restlessness which is so characteristic of fanaticism.¹⁴

The disciple who knows and understands this has perceived the mystery of the divine humility. And he knows that sometimes the Word will require that he take flight from the world's onslaught, while at other times he must be prepared to stand his ground--but only when the Word so wills. For this same weak Word is also the mighty Word of God

¹³Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 49.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 166.

which can convert sinners, and rules in its very weakness!

The concept of the weak word points to another characteristic of discipleship, the willingness to share in the vicarious suffering of Christ. Just as Jesus as the Christ must suffer and be rejected and die on the cross, so must the disciple be prepared to count the cost and freely decide to deny himself (i.e., to know Christ) and pick up his own cross and follow. But this kind of suffering is neither the self-pitying attitude of many hymns nor the ecstatic exaltation of the mystic. It is not accidental tragedy but the necessary suffering which is the fruit of allegiance to Christ. Nor do we have to go looking for a cross or suffering as such; for God has appointed every disciple his cross. It begins as the first Christ--suffering which every man must experience, namely, with the call to abandon the attachments of this world. Says Bonhoeffer: "It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."¹⁵ Bonhoeffer would preserve the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, but he sees its preservation as dependent upon an understanding of the costliness of the gift, so that it may be the sinner who is justified and not his sin.

III. THE ARCANUM

Bonhoeffer's own call of the church "back into the small conventicles" he apparently acted out for at least a two-year period (1935-37) in the Bruderhaus (House of Brethren) which he established

¹⁵Ibid., p. 79.

in connection with the Finkenwalde seminary. "When winning the masses seemed to determine the course of the day," says Bethge, "Bonhoeffer concentrated on the very small and reduced circle of interdependent persons."¹⁶ When some of the seminarians raised the question once whether perhaps they, too, ought to accept some limited compromises in order to find placement in more significant pulpits and thus reach more people, Bonhoeffer is said to have replied that one act of obedience is worth a hundred sermons. Noting that the idea of such a small community had been in Bonhoeffer's mind for a long time--even to the extent of a vita communis with a revival of some sort of classical vows--Bethge attributes the experiment of the Bruderhaus to four driving forces. First, his own experience since 1932 of daily meditation on a scripture passage--not for "sermon preparation," but meditative listening to the voices of the brethren who first listened to and pointed to the sources where Christ was to be heard. Second, Bonhoeffer was intrigued with Gandhi--both for a study of non-violent resistance as a possible pattern for Christian resistance against Hitler and to learn from Gandhi's ashrams. Third, the 19th century Anglican monasteries in Britain had taught him something for his own order of daily life and prayer. Fourth, the course of events in Germany made him sure that a change was needed in the education of ministers. For centuries this education had been exclusively in the hands of the state faculties. Bonhoeffer's doubts about the fitness of this purely intellectual framework of preparing one for spiritual education and discipline were

¹⁶Bethge, op. cit., p. 21.

confirmed by the dreadful dependence of the professors upon the state. Already in April 1933, they were subjected to the Aryan legislation, and later were forbidden to join the church opposition or write or act for them.

On this latter point, it should be noted that there is a discrepancy in Bonhoeffer's earlier and later attitudes. In 1934 in a letter to a Swiss friend, he called for "monastic-like schools in which the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount and the liturgy are taken seriously."¹⁷ Later, he pleaded for putting theology back into the open air of fierce discussion with philosophy and science. Acknowledging the apparent inconsistency, Bethge affirms, nevertheless, that this "open and fierce debate" was not meant to make the church unsure of herself. At this point we can see the need, therefore, of the Arkan-disziplin ("secret discipline") by which the church prepares herself, and keeps in touch with the Source of her strength and authority.

Even in the Confessing Church there were outcries of "re-Catholicization" in response to the Finkenwalde Brethren House. Bonhoeffer defended it, according to Bethge, with these four reasons:

(1) preaching with intrepidity comes better out of a brotherhood; (2) the general question of what Christian life is, can be given not in abstract but in a concrete common attempt to live together and reflect commonly the commandments of Christ; (3) there is needed a completely free group of pastors available for the battle outside, who renounce all traditional privileges; (4) lonely pastors need a spiritual refuge, a brotherhood where they can disappear for a while and be refreshed for the ministry.¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., p. 23. Here Bethge is quoting from Bonhoeffer's Gesammelte Schriften, I, 42.

¹⁸Ibid.

The main rules of the community were a daily order of prayer, free oral confession of sin, sharing the livelihood, and pledging to follow any emergency call by the church at once. Bethge notes that the community had a fast turnover because the emergency calls came rapidly with the growing rate of imprisonments, especially in 1937. He quotes Bonhoeffer again from the application: "Not the monastic seclusion, but the concentration for the life outside, this is the goal." But all of this was ended abruptly in 1937 when the Gestapo forcibly dissolved the Finkenwalde seminary.

Except for the premature abolition of the Finkenwalde community, it is unlikely that Life Together, the little book which had a wider distribution in Bonhoeffer's own lifetime than any of his others, would ever have been written, according to Bethge. Bonhoeffer considered the experiment to be still in its beginning, and did not wish to "export" it until it had been tried. But with its dissolution, and with no prospect of restoration, he decided to write down a description of the corporate life of the community (its "secret discipline") and some of its rationale.

Life Together does offer practical guidance to those who want to take their lives as Christians seriously, and it is based primarily on the concrete practical experience of the Finkenwalde community. But it is not just piety; in fact, Bonhoeffer was suspicious of movements that concentrated on "inner reflection" or dwelt upon themes of "conversion." Bethge offers this explanation: "The pietist danger, so near to his own concept, made him sharp and very unfriendly to similar-

looking experiments."¹⁹ Another quote from Bethge of how he remembers the Bruderhaus will perhaps help to correct any image of the fellowship as mystical or introspective:

The fierce opposition which Bonhoeffer first met from his own students against meditation and confession steadily abated, since everything was sanely balanced by hard theological work, by alert response to each turn of the church battle. Nobody acted more quickly and more critically than Bonhoeffer. Soon it became clear what it all was for. The personal Christian engagement had never the signs of remoteness, of mania or mystification. Nobody in Finkenwalde was more eager for plays and music than he. His inventive qualities in guessing games equaled that of any American quiz fan. And up to his imprisonment he was unlikely to miss a bridge party.²⁰

The book itself is divided into five chapters: "Community"; "The Day With Others"; "The Day Alone"; "Ministry"; and "Confession and Communion."

A. Community

Christian community, says Bonhoeffer is never to be taken for granted, but is to be received, if it is given, as a gift. The privilege of living with other Christians is an unspeakable gift. But he clarifies the difference between genuine Christian brotherhood and the "ideals" we conjure up in our visionary moments. Christianity means community in and through Jesus Christ, and a Christian needs others--not as he would "like" for them to be, but as they are given in Jesus Christ. This means, for example, that he depends upon the other as bearer of the Word, which sometimes declares him guilty even

¹⁹Ibid., p. 24.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 24-25.

when he feels righteous, or at other times pronounces him forgiven, even when he feels the burden of his guilt. Thus, men meet each other as bearers of the message of salvation. Further, it is only through Jesus Christ as Mediator that we can overcome the obstacle of our own ego to meet the brother, to serve one another, and to live together in peace. Thus to enter a community with idealized expectations in advance about "liking each other" is to put a barrier in the way of true fellowship and miss the real brother whom God may intend to give. As Bonhoeffer sums it up:

The existence of any Christian life together depends on whether it succeeds at the right time in bringing out the ability to distinguish between a human ideal and God's reality, between spiritual and human community.²¹

B. The Day With Others

Unlike the Old Testament day, which begins at evening and ends with the setting of the sun (a time of expectation), "the day of the New Testament church begins," says Bonhoeffer, "with the break of day and ends with the dawning light of the next morning. It is the time of fulfillment, the resurrection of the Lord."²² For this reason, the Christian's day appropriately begins with the community gathered for praise and thanks, reading of the Scriptures, and prayer. This activity can, and should, vary as to form to account for the type of community (e.g., a family with children will vary in its service from a

²¹Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 37.

²²Ibid., p. 40.

fellowship of ministers), but all should include Scripture, hymns, and prayer. Bonhoeffer here dwells at some length on the need for and the proper use of the Psalms, "the Prayerbook of the Bible." He points out that these psalms belong not to the individual but to the church, and should be understood as Christ's prayers. This overcomes the individual's difficulty with the imprecatory psalms and of those pleading innocence and righteousness, for it is Christ's judgment and his righteousness that are referred to.

As for the Scriptures, they should be read in sequence and in long sections--not now for detailed study, but to see the total sweep and continuity of the Word of God. In this way we become participants in what has taken place for our salvation. "We are torn out of our own existence and set down in the midst of the holy history of God on earth."²³ The Scriptures are the Christian's indispensable equipment:

What we call our life, our troubles, our guilt, is by no means all of reality; there in the Scriptures is our life, our need, our guilt, and our salvation. . . . Only in the Holy Scriptures do we learn to know our own history How, for example, shall we ever attain certainty and confidence in our personal and church activity if we do not stand on solid Biblical ground? It is not our heart that determines our course, but God's Word. . . . One who will not learn to handle the Bible for himself is not an evangelical Christian.²⁴

Christian worship also includes singing, because singing symbolically and actually takes the body beyond the mere speaking of the Word:

The fact that we do not speak it but sing it only expresses the fact that our spoken words are inadequate to express what we want to say, that the burden of our song

²³Ibid., p. 53.

²⁴Ibid., p. 54-55.

goes far beyond all human words. Yet we do not hum a melody; we sing words of praise to God, words of thanksgiving, confession, and prayer. Thus the music is completely the servant of the Word.²⁵

The prayer which concludes the devotion is a free prayer, because however helpful the prayers of the church may be in helping us pray rightly, they must not take the place of our own prayer. But although it is a free prayer, spoken by one of the members, it is not his prayer but the prayer of the whole fellowship. They, in turn, should intercede for him, and thus enable him to pray the prayer of the whole.

C. The Day Alone

In addition to the day spent in fellowship with others, there is also time spent alone. For the Christian, the mark of fellowship is speech (but not idle chatter); whereas the mark of solitude is silence (but not dumbness). There is a dynamic interrelationship of the two, but either one is deadly without the other: "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. . . . (But) let him who is not in community beware of being alone."²⁶ In the genuine silence of his solitude--"the sober consequence of spiritual stillness"--the Christian should set aside a time for meditation, devoted to the Scriptures, private prayer, and intercession. It is not a time for going down into the void and abyss of loneliness; it is the opportunity to be alone with the Word.

²⁵Ibid., p. 59.

²⁶Ibid., p. 77.

The appropriate stance before the Word (Scripture) in this context is not the long consecutive reading, but the pondering of a brief selected text for its word of personal address. We should neither expect nor resist any extraordinary experience in our meditation; they might or might not come.

Meditation on scripture leads naturally to prayer. Here Bonhoeffer's understanding of prayer is instructive:

Prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one's personal situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations. What can never enter the corporate prayer of the fellowship may here be silently made known to God.²⁷

Praying in solitude includes intercession in a very special way. It allows us to mention those especially committed to our care in a way in which corporate prayer does not. But the Christian fellowship lives by the mutual intercession of its members; for one can no longer condemn nor hate the brother for whom he prays.

The rationale for Christian meditation is summed up by Bonhoeffer in a way that avoids legalism and pietism:

Since meditation on the Scriptures, prayer, and intercession are a service we owe and because the grace of God is found in this service, we should train ourselves to set apart a regular hour for it, as we do for every other service we perform. This is not "legalism"; it is orderliness and fidelity. . . . Who can really be faithful in great things if he has not learned to be faithful in the things of daily life?²⁸

And the test of meditation and fellowship comes during the long hours when the Christian finds himself alone in an unchristian setting.

²⁷Ibid., p. 85.

²⁸Ibid., p. 87.

Here it will be revealed whether the fellowship has made him strong and mature or weak and dependent, and whether his meditation has led him into an unreal (though perhaps even ecstatic) experience from which he awakens terrified by the real world, or whether it has led him into contact with God, from which he returns to the world strengthened.

D. Ministry

Realizing the danger to any fellowship of the subtle contest for power, Bonhoeffer offers his Scriptural antidote for such "reasoning . . . which . . . should be greatest" (Luke 9:46). That is, "who-soever will be great among you, shall be your minister" (Mark 10:43). Therefore, there are several "ministries" prescribed for the Christian toward his brothers. Two of these are holding one's tongue and meekness. Discipline of the tongue not only avoids the obvious hurt which covert speech about a brother engenders; it also releases the disciplined one from constantly scrutinizing, judging and condemning the other person as a means of getting the advantage over him. And anyone who lives by the forgiveness of his own sin in Jesus Christ cannot be other than meek before the neighbor. Bonhoeffer says: "not self-justification, which means the use of domination and force, but justification by grace, and therefore service, should govern the Christian community."²⁹

There is also the ministry of listening; and "he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God

²⁹Ibid., p. 94.

either." And our ministry of helpfulness extends even to simple assistance in trifling, external matters. "Only where hands are not too good for deeds of love and mercy in everyday helpfulness can the mouth joyfully and convincingly proclaim the message of God's love and mercy."³⁰ The ministry of bearing comes from Paul's exhortation in Galatians 6:2: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." This means, according to Bonhoeffer, the full acceptance of the freedom of the other person. This includes not only his weakness and his oddity, but even his sin. To be sure, sin is the abuse of that freedom; yet Christ has borne our sins, and we, by bearing one another's sins may preserve the fellowship through the forgiving of sins and in our mutual intercession for one another.

The most important ministry of the Christian is the ministry of proclaiming the Word. This is not limited to the office of the ordained ministry. Rather, says Bonhoeffer, "we are thinking of that unique situation in which one person bears witness in human words to another person, bespeaking the whole consolation of God, the admonition, the kindness and the severity of God."³¹ This is a perilous enterprise, for unless it is accompanied by worthy listening, we cannot really speak the right word for the other person. Moreover, it must steer between the Scylla of too much idle speech to "talk away" the other's need and the Charybdis of keeping silent just when we were the one who had opportunity to speak the healing word. This ministry extends even to the reproof of open sin; but that is not disparagement or condem-

³⁰Ibid., p. 100.

³¹Ibid., p. 103f.

nation. God alone is to judge, and every Christian knows himself also to be just a forgiven sinner. Finally, the ministry of authority is dependent not upon skill, cunning or brilliance, but upon the degree to which one has kept the other ministries. "The Church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren,"³² asserts Bonhoeffer. The Church will not place its confidence in brilliance alone, but only in the "simple servant of the Word of Jesus Christ, because it knows that then it will be guided, not according to human wisdom and human conceit, but by the Word of the Good Shepherd."

E. Confession and Communion

Confession and Communion are the subjects of the final chapter. The Christian community does not, as pious fellowships do, exclude sinners. Rather, the final breakthrough to community can occur only when we discover that we are nothing more than sinners under grace. But the Scriptures command us to confess our sins and empower the followers of Christ, his Church, to forgive us: "Confess your faults to one another" (James 5:16); and, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:23). Thus Christ made the church, and in it our brother, a blessing to us. Therefore one dares to be a sinner before the Christian brother, in the knowledge that Christ became our Brother in order to help us. "Through him our brother has become Christ for us in the

³²Ibid., p. 109.

power and authority of the commission Christ has given to him."³³ Confession provides "breakthroughs" to community, to the cross, to certainty, and to new life. To the first, breakthrough is possible because the sin which isolates one from the fellowship is exposed and forgiven; the "old man" dies through the debasement of his pride and he discovers the redemption of the cross; the break with the past leads to new commitment; and the delusion of "forgiving one's own sin" is overcome by hearing the forgiving word from outside through the brother. Even so, confession is not a "law." Rather, it is a gift of God's mercy. No one is obliged to accept it; but since God has deemed the offer necessary, one might wonder how he could refuse it without loss.

Reginald Fuller, in his essay, "Liturgy and Devotion,"³⁴ has noted, with some disappointment, that in this his most direct address to liturgical life, Bonhoeffer has left any mention of Holy Communion to the very last--almost as an afterthought. Fuller allows, however, that this might be explained by an insight that Holy Communion belongs to the whole church and not to a special group within it. Therefore, the seminary community would have been expected to participate with a local congregation in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. In any case, Bonhoeffer sees the practice of confession as preparation for the Lord's Supper in a joyful spirit of reconciliation and fulfillment of Christian fellowship. Bonhoeffer concludes on this triumphant note:

The day of the Lord's Supper is an occasion of joy for the Christian community. Reconciled in their hearts with God and the brethren, the congregation receives the gift of

³³Ibid., p. 111.

³⁴Marty, The Place of Bonhoeffer, pp. 175ff.

the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and, receiving that, it receives forgiveness, new life, and salvation. . . . The life of Christians together under the Word has reached its perfection in the sacrament.³⁵

In this work we see evidence of the kind of self-discipline which many have stated as characteristic of Bonhoeffer.³⁶ But we also see how this motif carries itself out in community where discipline, order, and work are also important to the corporate structures of Christian life. As has been pointed out, this was only one experiment--not inflexible and rigid at that--and Bonhoeffer apparently did not offer it as normative. However, we do see the continual guard against self-righteousness, false piety, or mystical escape from the realities of life. Moreover, the Letters and Papers from Prison show evidence that Bonhoeffer retained this discipline of devotional life even under the most severe circumstances, and could see symbolic significance even in breaking the bread of a prisoner's meal. But again, lest false piety be suspected, he was also willing to admit that for long periods Bible reading was difficult, and even on occasion that he did not so much miss going to church. These thoughts will be discussed more fully in Chapter IV, but to anticipate them here serves to connect the deep-rooted commitment to the individual and corporate dimensions of church life with the exciting, though fragmentary, insights of the final period. It should be remembered also that during the Finkenwalde

³⁵Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 122.

³⁶Cf. also Bonhoeffer's poem, "Stations on the Road to Freedom" in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 228f, for Bonhoeffer's own stated appeal for the importance of discipline.

period out of which Life Together grew, Bonhoeffer was also deeply engrossed in the hard realities of the life-and-death (for the church) German Church Struggle.

IV. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA FROM THE PERIOD OF THE "NARROW PASS"

In his volume on The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,³⁷ Godsey has an extended discussion of the German Church Struggle and Bonhoeffer's role in it. Bethge omits this phase of Bonhoeffer's career in his short (Alden-Tuthill) lectures in order to focus on the "inner course of his life and thought." A few brief highlights are given here to place in perspective Bonhoeffer's decision to enter into active and direct political action against Hitler.

Behind the whole church struggle was a conflict over the proper relationship between church and state. In 1933 Bonhoeffer concerned himself with this issue in three major essays. In "Thy Kingdom Come!" he posed the Lutheran doctrine of the two realms growing out of creation, man's disobedience and fall into slavery, and the miraculous breaking of that curse through the redemption of Christ. In this miracle of redemption, God spoke his "Yes!" to the created order, its communities, and its history. Moreover, he planted his Kingdom in the midst of her in twofold form: first the Kingdom of the resurrection miracle which breaks the curse of death and brings to naught all man's earthly kingdoms; and second the Kingdom of order which affirms and preserves the earth with its laws, communities, and history. The

³⁷Godsey, op. cit., pp. 107-118.

first is the church, the second the state; they are properly inter-related, but neither may overstep the boundary of the other--i.e., church may not become state, nor the state the church. The Christian's role is to be obedient in both.

In a second essay, "What is Church?" he pressed further, in recognition that where human beings are involved, the "theoretical" distinctions may become blurred. The church has the right and the obligation to speak two "political words" to the state. One is to call the state to account in accordance with its own limitations. But in the event the state will not listen, Bonhoeffer affirms that the church must ultimately have the right to direct political involvement as an act of obedience. She must exercise extreme caution here, and must use existing parties as channels for her action if at all possible. And she must ask whether any given action is worth the risk of jeopardizing her "first" word. Yet ultimately, direct action must remain a possibility for the church in obedient response to the command of God.

A third essay in 1933 was called "The Church before the Jewish Question," in which Bonhoeffer clarified the church's position further. The church may act against the state only when the state has violated its own reason for being and thus has ceased to be the state, either from too little order (allowing some to live outside the law), or from too much order (as in suppressing the Christian gospel). In such an event, the church has three recourses: (1) to call the state into account to fulfill its legitimate function; (2) to aid the victims of the state's injustice whether they are Christian or not (e.g., the Jews under the Third Reich); and (3) to throw itself into the spokes

of the "wheel of state" by direct action against it! The latter course is only for extreme cases and in statu confessionis; but paradoxically, it is the church's way of affirming the state by forcing its hand to require that it function in its proper office. In 1933 Bonhoeffer felt the first two courses were demands of the hour with respect to the Jewish question, but the third would have to issue from an "evangelical council."

Meanwhile, the third course of action became a closed issue with the 1933 elections of church leaders, for an overwhelming majority of German Christians were placed in office. Since these men were consciously or unconsciously being used by the diabolical Nazi state, there was little chance of any action against the state. Moreover, the question could be shifted to look like an intra-church struggle instead of a church-state conflict. In the light of this treason within the church, Bonhoeffer's third possibility of direct action was called for--this time with the church herself the victim of the state. This action was taken by the Barmen and Dahlem synods in 1934 when they set up the Confessing Church, declared it the one true church and declared the German Christians heretics who had excluded themselves because of false doctrines incongruous with the Church of Christ.

Bonhoeffer was in London at the time of these synods, but he fully supported them. Just as he had previously spoken for the necessity of such action, once it had been taken, he became one of the staunchest defenders of the Confessing Church's stand. In fact it was his outspokenness which eventuated in his being branded by the Nazis as an instigator and finally a traitor, and he was finally forbidden

to teach, preach, or write. It was against such a background that he plunged wholeheartedly into the life of the opposition within the Confessing Church, teaching at the illegal Finkenwalde seminary and frequently making persuasive addresses when the pastors would show signs of weakening with respect to Barmen and Dahlem.

This may shed some light on the turns that led Bonhoeffer into the "narrow pass" of trying at all costs to "be the church" even when an evil state forced the church underground. But the "otherness" which the church cultivated there also had to be questioned and corrected. As one intimately connected with these events and the central figure in them, Bethge summarizes this period:

What happened was that the second period had slowly become acceptable; in the minds of his friends the bellicose ghetto on Bonhoeffer had turned into a self-contained one. And as soon as the Christian life becomes self-contained, even its enemies will not bother about it. Now the opposite seems to be true. The third period, of Bonhoeffer's solidarity with the world, is favored in many quarters, and the second is not known or is overlooked as the detour. Is it not useful to keep moving in order to experience the costly fullness of grace instead of the palatable cheap one? The self-contained "otherness" of the second period is cheap, the self-contained "solidarity with the godless" of the third period is shallow.

Solidarity will give the otherness strength, and otherness will give the solidarity truth. But this is not a dialectical game of the intellect; it is the intelligent and sacrificial way to follow the next step of the concretely present Christ, and not to stay behind.³⁸

After the dissolution of the seminary, Bonhoeffer continued his work with the students by having them placed as vicars (Hilfsprediger) in nearby congregations, and they would meet for instruction several

³⁸Bethge, op. cit., p. 25.

days a week. In 1939 a lecture tour was arranged for him in the United States, but he cancelled it rather shortly after his arrival in New York to return to Germany to work with the opposition and to suffer with his people in order that he might be able to join in the reconstruction of Germany once sanity and peace could be restored. This is the background for the third and final period of Bonhoeffer's career in which his involvement in the struggles of the church in Germany became political--though, of course, not without deeply theological implications.

CHAPTER IV

LIBERATION: CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT RELIGION

THE THIRD PERIOD: 1940-1945

Bonhoeffer's Ethics¹ and his Letters and Papers from Prison² are the primary sources for the third and final period of his career as Bethge has divided it. Bonhoeffer's self-appointed "life task" was to write a Christian ethic. This chapter examines the portion of his work which was left, unfinished and unedited, and later put in its present form by Bethge to be published. The Letters and Papers are also fragmentary and were not intended for publication, but they offer some of Bonhoeffer's most intriguing concepts.

This is the period of the search for "non-religious interpretations of biblical concepts for a world come of age." But this is not interpreted as confirming the world in its own self-idolatry nor as the abandonment of the church as an institution. The period leaves only fragments of Bonhoeffer's thought, but the attempt here has been to avoid the extremes of either absolutizing his tentative insights or ignoring altogether the promise they hold. The conclusion of direct evaluation of Bonhoeffer's life and thought provides a starting point for the proposal of a model for the contemporary church which benefits from his legacy to the urban-secular world.

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

I. REALITY-BASED ETHIC

From his doctrine of the roles of church and state (outlined above in Chapter III), one can intuit the ambivalence which Bonhoeffer as a pastor must have felt in deciding to enter active political opposition to the Hitler regime. The agony of such a decision must have been the more intense because, in order to be effective in his opposition to Naziism, he had to join in its "great masquerade of evil." Some of this ambiguity may be sensed in these lines of Bonhoeffer's:

The great masquerade of evil has wrought havoc with all our ethical preconceptions. This appearance of evil in the guise of light, beneficence and historical necessity is utterly bewildering to anyone nurtured in our traditional ethical systems. But for the Christian who frames his life on the Bible it simply confirms the radical evilness of evil.³

Nor did Bonhoeffer's own conviction about the correctness of his course save him from the agony of not knowing whether he would be accepted by the church after the war because of his involvement in the political resistance. After years of passive resistance--writing and speaking as a churchman against anti-Semitism, being disappointed with the society's reaction, and waiting in vain for the church to speak out--Bonhoeffer switched to active resistance in 1940 by joining the circle of German political opposition centered in the office of Admiral Canaris and his deputy, General Oster, head of the Military Intelligence Service. His contact with these conspirators came through his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, also of the Oster office.

³Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 17.

Bonhoeffer had already refused the safety of the United States, feeling he could not evade the struggle of the German people and still have a share in the restoration of life in Germany after the war. But now he faced conscription and all the self-contradiction of fighting in the German ranks. Through von Dohnanyi, he was taken on as a civilian employee of Military Intelligence--partly to escape conscription and partly to use his knowledge and his contacts outside Germany for the resistance. On a trip to Switzerland as a V-man he saw both Visser 't Hooft and Barth in 1941. Later, he traveled to Sweden for a meeting with Bishop Bell in 1942 to convey the plotters' plans to the British government in the hope of obtaining a cessation of hostilities.⁴ And so Bonhoeffer used his relative freedom and "immunity" in the Intelligence service to aid the opposition and serve as courier. In an address over the British Broadcasting Corporation on November 21, 1955, Eberhard Bethge told of a meeting with Bonhoeffer, late in his imprisonment but while he still had hope of release, in which he wondered how the Church would respond to his political role:

He was troubled by the thought whether he and what he had done could be acceptable to the church when he was free once again. He did not worry about what he had done. He acted in full clarity and responsibility when, in 1939, he had resisted the temptation to remain in America and to devote himself there to his theological studies, as his friends had pressed him to do. He had been quite clear that he had to accept his country's shame and its consequences. But his action was his own, not that of his Church. He knew that the Church of Luther in Germany had never envisaged the possibility of a plot against the State,

⁴Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology" Chicago Theological Seminary Register, LI:2 (February, 1961), 27.

and that her tradition and her teaching had always neatly separated what he now united in his person, namely, the job of a parson and the job of a politician and conspirator. So he asked whether the Church, with all her clumsy heaviness, would rouse herself and accept and work into her system the attack on those principles which had now proved to be barren; in other words, whether she would understand and proclaim her freedom from those principles which had been turned into a weapon against her in the cunning hand of the diabolical enemy, tying down the Christians in Germany and making them sterile. Bonhoeffer's anxiety was well founded. His death, which he suffered ten years ago, along with the conspirators Canaris and Oster, is after all a factor, because his Church has now to accept him as he was, and because she cannot ignore one of her rare martyrs.⁵

Perhaps it was such intimate acquaintance with the man, his thought, and the events of those times which led Bethge in the other addresses referred to previously to observe: "With Bonhoeffer, actions and life comment on his sayings, and the words on his actions, in an extraordinary degree."⁶ And in the same lecture, he characterizes the period covered by the present chapter as signifying a "switch" from ardent devotion to liberating this-worldliness."⁷ Having already cautioned us that the Ethics as it stands in an unpolished and fragmentary compilation, Bethge says that it represents four new and different approaches to ethics between 1940 and 1943.⁸ It might be helpful to review these four as Bethge sees them before a somewhat fuller development of one of the specific themes of Bonhoeffer in this period--reality.

⁵Eberhard Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Champion of Freedom," a radio address reprinted in World Dominion, XXXV (April, 1957), 79f.

⁶Bethge, op. cit., 26.

⁷Ibid., p. 28.

⁸Ibid., pp. 29ff.

A. Four Approaches to the Ethics

The first approach, says Bethge, is represented by Chapter iv of the Ethics, and speaks the language of Cost of Discipleship. But it stresses in a new emphasis the oneness of the world and God in Christ, as exemplified in a quote from Ethics (p. 180): "The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of His dominion will be disclosed to us." The second approach (Ethics, chap. i) strides forward with as strong a christological basis as ever, and speaks of "Ethics as formation" or "conformation." Christ as Lord and Redeemer of the world is center, aim and reason of all human reality. By Christ's conforming to this world, he draws this world into conformation to himself. Bethge sees here a connection with the time-and-place-bound Lordship of Bonhoeffer's shy attempts of 1932. Though the danger of an interpretation of Bonhoeffer's intention as being the clericalization of the world would perhaps be closest here, such an interpretation would be misleading. (Bonhoeffer makes it quite clear that the church does not rule the world--Christ does.)⁹ The relation between church and world comes much more positively into the foreground. In Cost of Discipleship, the world was the place just for the first step in believing; now the Lordship of Christ establishes explicit responsibilities in history. Bethge adds: "In these September days of 1940 the relations between church and world assumes the form of a blessed discovery."¹⁰

⁹Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 264.

¹⁰Bethge, "The Challenge..." p. 30.

The third approach (chap. iii) was written only a few weeks later in the monastery in Ettal where Bonhoeffer spent some time as a guest, and includes one of his most fruitful formulas. It speaks of the "last things and things before the last." The "things before the last," the penultimate, is established and limited by the ultimate, but it has its own autonomy--given, of course, by the ultimate. Since this is a crucial concept, Bethge's extended comment would be helpful here:

The last word as the justification by faith embraces beginning and end, limits, and puts into force the penultimate; it is in time and quality the first and the last. The penultimate maintains, prepares the way for, and is before the last, but having its full, free, established autonomous right. The structure of the ultimate and penultimate represents the christological order. In Christ the last "neither renders the human reality independent nor destroys it," the penultimate "has become the outer covering of the ultimate" (E, p. 90). In the Cross the ultimate become the judgment of and at the same moment the grace of the penultimate. Life as the penultimate is sharing or "is participation in the encounter of Christ with the world" (E, p. 91). Related to Christ's Lordship, life comes to its relative, but full, autonomy.¹¹

Bethge sees a connection between the fully articulated concept here of the penultimate and Bonhoeffer's reference to the "first step before you believe" in Cost of Discipleship. There he was speaking of the inseparability of faith and obedience--with the obedient act of placing oneself in the context for hearing the word as a necessary "first step" to belief. Of course faith is still the basis of justification, but in the autonomy of the world--in the penultimate--the world is not only free to accept God's grace through faith, but the Christian is free to participate with the world in its penultimate autonomy and

¹¹Ibid. (parentheses indicate the page numbers of the quotes Bethge uses from Bonhoeffer's Ethics.)

thus as the body of Christ to participate in Christ's encounter with the world.

The fourth and last new approach is represented by chapters vi and vii, and is characterized by a concept very similar in tone to the prison letters--"the setting-free of life for genuine worldliness."¹² The basis for this "setting-free" comes from Bonhoeffer's treatment of one of his dominant themes, "reality." A fuller treatment of the concept of reality and its christological basis is now in order.

B. God's Reality as Basis for Ethic

In treating the concept of reality, Bonhoeffer asserts that all questions concerning ethical behavior must be settled by the Christian in the light of a decision about ultimate reality. The traditional approach to ethics of asking "How can I do good?" and "How can I be good?" must be discarded, for they draw attention to oneself and the world as the seat of ultimate reality and the norm of good. Rather, we must decide in the face of ultimate reality as given by God "What is the will of God?" And the only way of knowing God is through his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Since this represents ultimate reality, it must be the starting point of any discussion of Christian ethics. Just as the problem of dogmatics is the truth of God's revelational reality in Jesus Christ, so the problem of ethics is the realization among God's creatures of this reality. So we see that Bonhoeffer's Christian ethic is based in christology. Man cannot be

¹²Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 263.

separated into parts (e.g., "will" and "act") and have one of them be the measure of "goodness." It is the whole man who is judged, and not on the basis of either motive or consequences alone of his deeds. Actually a 'good' motive can spring from a very dark background; and a 'good attitude' can eventuate into very bad actions. But the "good" is reality as seen by God; man is a part of God's (good) reality, both individually and in society; and man participates in this reality in and through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Christian inquiry concerning good is the question whether one participates in this reality.

There is a positivistic (non-Christian) ethic which also speaks of reality. But there it means only the expedient, useful, or empirically verifiable. Hence there can be no norms, but only infinitely variable determinants of good. The Christian knows, however, that reality consists in and through God, who gives the norms. This is not merely an idea, though; for God has manifested himself in Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus Christ is not to be equated with either an 'ideal standard' or with "things as they are." Both the "is" and the "should be" are rather reconciled in Christ--that is, in ultimate reality. Thus the enquiry concerning good is an enquiry about participation in this ultimate reality.

Now to partake in the reality of God is to partake in the reality of the world, and vice versa. Or, as Bonhoeffer puts it,

The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world; and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God.¹³

¹³Ibid., p. 61.

By enquiring about the realization in our world of this divine and cosmic reality which is given in Christ, Christian ethics does not mean that 'our world' is something outside that reality or that it is not already part of the world which is sustained, accepted and reconciled in him. To counteract such a notion, Bonhoeffer declares:

The enquiry is directed rather towards the way in which the reality in Christ, which for a long time already has comprised us and our world within itself, it taking effect as something now present, and towards the way in which life may be conducted in this reality. Its purpose is, therefore, participation in the reality of God and of the world in Jesus Christ today; and this participation must be such that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world or the reality of the world without the reality of God.¹⁴

C. Positivism and Idealism Rejected

Bonhoeffer avoids the positivistic over-valuation of the world by pointing to the fact that the norm for judging it comes from beyond the world itself, namely, from God who defines the limits of life in the penultimate. But he also avoids the (perhaps greater) danger of an idealistic devaluation of the world by giving full freedom to the worldly sphere--in its penultimate, and therefore relative, autonomy--to participate in the sustained and accepted reality of God.

The idealistic devaluation of the world results from a rather entrenched, though erroneous, way of thinking in terms of two spheres. The "sacred" sphere, the regnum gratiae, is seen by this way of thinking to be the realm of reality in Christ; and the "profane" sphere,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 62.

the regnum naturae, is termed the reality of the world. By this false dichotomy, man would be forced into the dilemma of a choice for Christ without the world or the world without Christ. We must reject such thinking, says Bonhoeffer, for there is only one reality--not two--and that is the unity of the secular and the Christian in the reality of Christ himself. In "two spheres" thinking, only static antagonism persists. This need not be the case, asserts Bonhoeffer:

But these things assume quite a different form with the recognition of the divine and cosmic reality in Christ. The world, the natural, the profane and reason are now all taken up into God from the outset. They do not exist 'in themselves' and 'on their own account.' They have their reality nowhere save in the reality of God, in Christ. It is now essential to the real concept of the secular that it shall always be seen in the movement of being accepted and becoming accepted by God in Christ.¹⁵

This begins to set the world free to receive its reconciliation with God. It not only allows the Christian to participate in the world, it implies that he must be involved in the world actualizing its acceptance in God's reality by witnessing to the reconciliation of the world by Christ, "not on the boundary, but in the center of life." But this is not to equate "the secular" with Christ, as we see in these cautions of Bonhoeffer's:

And yet what is Christian is not identical with what is of the world. . . . So. . . . there must be a Christian or 'spiritual' polemical reply to the secular element when there is a danger that this element may make itself independent, as was the case soon after the Reformation and especially in nineteenth-century German secularist Protestantism. . . . and today, when Christianity is employed as a polemical weapon against the secular, this must be

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 64f.

done in the name of a better secularity and above all it must not lead back to a static predominance of the spiritual sphere as an end in itself.¹⁶

Christian ethics is not based on abstract principles. Christian action is that which is in accordance with reality, for it allows the world to be the world. Yet it never forgets that in Jesus Christ the world is loved (seen in the Incarnation), condemned (evidenced by the crucifixion), and reconciled (witnessed to by the Resurrection) by God. If the 'worldly' is left alone, it strives for its own deification which results in idolatry. If Christians take up arms against the world, it only widens the breach between the world and Christ and the world is more estranged than ever. The task, then, is to allow for true worldliness--possible only on the basis of the proclamation of the cross of Jesus Christ--in which the world is allowed to be what it really is before God, namely, a world which in its godlessness is reconciled with God.

II. FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY AS THEOLOGICAL KEY

Bonhoeffer came to oppose the Kantian view that man is first of all set in the midst of duties to be faced, and that only after fulfilling these duties is man justified in speaking of his rights. To the artificiality of such a legalistic view, Bonhoeffer replied in terms of freedom and joy: "Life is not only a means to an end but is also an end in itself"¹⁷ and, "God gives before He demands."¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid. p. 65.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 106

¹⁸Ibid., p. 108.

But he would also have us avoid the opposite extreme of libertinism or of the "enthusiasts" danger which simply places the seal of approval on the world "as it is." The way to avoid both dangers is again the christological approach. Bethge discloses that during the period of his working through this problem, Bonhoeffer read with new fascination Don Quixote, the honorable knight who became isolated from reality by fighting for a principle. Bonhoeffer sees the liberation from legalism and the avoidance of "enthusiasm" in a proper understanding of the corresponding concepts of freedom and responsibility.

A. Freedom and Responsibility as Corollaries

Freedom and responsibility are necessary corollaries of one another, says Bonhoeffer, for "factually, though not chronologically, responsibility presupposes freedom and freedom can consist only in responsibility."¹⁹ Responsibility is the freedom of men, but only in the obligation to God and to our neighbor is this freedom given. The responsible man is one who acts in the freedom of his own self. He will give due consideration to the given human and general conditions and to matters of principle; yet he acts freely without the support of men, circumstances, or principles. Proof of this freedom may be seen from the fact that nothing can answer for or exonerate man except his own deed and his own self. He is the one who must observe, judge, decide, and act. He must examine the motives, the prospects, the value and purpose of his action; but he cannot make the purity of

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 216f.

motivation, the circumstances, the value nor the purpose of an undertaking the law to which he appeals as authority or for acquittal of his deed. If he did that, he would no longer be truly free. The one obligation which gives entire freedom is the obligation to God and our neighbor, which we see concretely in Jesus Christ. Yet the responsible man performs his action wholly within the relativity--the "twilight zone" which the historical situation spreads over good and evil--for he knows that he must decide not only between right and wrong, but between relative degrees of right and right or wrong and wrong. Still, responsible action is free action precisely in the fact that it is not justified in advance by any law, nor does it claim any ultimate knowledge of good and evil. The responsible man performs his action in obedience to God, and in that very obedience, finds his freedom. Bonhoeffer states it this way:

Good, as what is responsible, is performed in ignorance of good and in the surrender to God of the deed which has become necessary and which is nevertheless, or for that very reason, free; for it is God who sees the heart, who weighs up the deed, and who directs the course of history.²⁰

Bonhoeffer then poses a test of the concept of responsibility by an inquiry into the nature of obedience. Is it possible, he inquires, to find much significance in the term "responsibility" when most people live their lives in situations that are, for the most part, determined for them by a relatively few in "responsible positions"? The laborer, the clerk, the private soldier, the apprentice and the schoolboy live mostly in obedience to superiors. Moreover, even the

²⁰Ibid., pp. 217f.

craftsman, the politician, the general, the teacher and the judge have their lives more or less circumscribed by technique and duty, only rarely calling for really free decision. But this kind of thinking calls for one ethic for the very few great and strong and another for the small and the weak. If only the former are thought of as responsible, most people render only obedience as their duty. Such misconceptions are common, admits Bonhoeffer, and this creates a situation in which many are ethically emasculated by being taught to accept an assigned place in accordance with rather strict social regimentation. It renders the individual relatively free from ethical dangers, but it robs him of his creative moral power, freedom.

To counteract the error of such thinking, Bonhoeffer asserts that every life can experience the situation of freedom in its most characteristic form, namely, in the encounter with other people--especially with his family and his workmates. Only if genuine responsibility is fulfilled at this point is there a possibility of extending the sphere of responsibility into vocational and public life. Where man meets man, responsibility arises; and these responsible relationships cannot be supplanted by any general regulation or routine. This means, furthermore, that responsibility does not only stand side by side with relationships of obedience, it has its place also within these relationships. Obedience and responsibility are linked. Responsibility does not begin only where obedience leaves off, but obedience is rendered in responsibility. The apprentice has a duty of obedience towards his master but, at the same time, he has also a free responsibility for his work, for his achievement and,

therefore, also for his master.

Again, the basis for Bonhoeffer's view is christologically based. Jesus Christ has realized the ultimate relation of men to God. He stands before God as the one who is both obedient and free-as the obedient one by his blind compliance with his Father's will, and as the free one, acquiescent in God's will out of his own most personal knowledge. With open eyes and joyous heart he recreated this will out of himself. Obedience without freedom is slavery; freedom without obedience is arbitrary self-will.

Thus Bonhoeffer concludes that in responsibility both obedience and freedom are realized. The interrelationships of freedom and obedience within responsibility are summarized by Bonhoeffer:

To make obedience independent of freedom leads only to the Kantian ethic of duty, and to make freedom independent of obedience leads only to the ethic of irresponsible genius. Both the man of duty and the genius carry their justification within themselves. The man of responsibility stands between obligation and freedom; he must dare to act under obligation and in freedom; yet he finds his justification neither in his obligation nor in his freedom but solely in Him who has put him in this (humanly impossible) situation and who requires this deed of him. The responsible man delivers up himself and his deed to God.²¹

In expanding the limits of obedience and freedom and in resolving them in the concept of one's responsibility in his ultimate relationship to God, Bonhoeffer is aware of the troublesome questions this raises. Does responsibility set one in an unlimited field of activity; or does it confine one strictly to the limits of his concrete daily tasks? The two extremes might lead one either into impotent

²¹Ibid., p. 221.

zeal against all the wrong and misery in the world, or into self-satisfied security in his own narrow sphere, content to let the wicked world run its course. The double question then becomes, "What is the place, and what are the limits of my responsibility?"

B. Vocation

To answer this question, Bonhoeffer seeks to reclaim the concept of the vocation. The place of one's responsibility is wherever grace lays hold of him. Man does not seek out grace, but grace seeks and finds man. In the encounter with Jesus Christ man hears the call of God and in it the calling to life in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. At the precise place where he is he is to hear the call and allow it to lay claim to him. Now his vocation or calling is his response to this encounter, and it encompasses the totality of his life situation. As Bonhoeffer puts it, "from the standpoint of Christ this life is now my calling; from my own standpoint it is my responsibility."²²

This concept of vocation avoids two disastrous misunderstandings, the secular Protestant one and the monastic one. Against the secular Protestant view, which merely was the concept of vocation as a sanctioning of secular occupations and institutions, Bonhoeffer has this to say:

It is not in the loyal discharge of the earthly obligations of his calling as a citizen, a worker and a father that man fulfills the responsibility which is imposed on him, but it is in hearing the call of Jesus Christ. . . . The calling, in the New Testament sense is

²²Ibid., p. 223.

never a sanctioning of worldly institutions as such; its 'yes' to them always includes at the same time an extremely emphatic 'no,' an extremely sharp protest against the world. . . . Now a man takes up his position against the world in the world; the calling is the place at which the call of Christ is answered, the place at which a man lives responsibly.²³

Medieval monasticism recognized that the call of Jesus Christ involves man in a struggle against the world, but it mistakenly assumed that one could find a place which is not in the world (the monastery) and at which this call can, therefore, be answered more fitly. This view fails to recognize God's 'no' to the world, including the monastery, but it also fails to take account of God's 'yes,' in which he reconciles the world with Himself.

The calling, therefore, is the call of Jesus Christ to belong wholly to Him. It embraces work with things and relations with persons; it demands a 'limited field of accomplishments,' yet never as a value in itself, but in responsibility towards Jesus Christ. This relation to Christ breaks the boundary of the isolated 'fields of accomplishments,' for in fulfilling one's concrete responsibility in his own position, he is acting in behalf of all men and in response to Christ. For example, the physician serves his patients; but in so doing, he also serves medical science and with it science and truth in general. In this concrete position he is continuously aware of his responsibility as a whole, and it is in this that he fulfills his calling. Furthermore, it may happen that he will be obliged to recognize at some point he can no longer fulfill his concrete responsibility

²³Ibid.

by the sickbed; but, for example, in taking public action against some measure threatening medical science or human life or science as such. In sum, says Bonhoeffer, "vocation is responsibility and responsibility is a total response of the whole of man to the whole of reality."²⁴ As both a guide and a caution, he points out that there is a wrong and a right extension and a wrong and a right restriction of responsibility. One is an enthusiastic breaking-down of all limits; the other is a legalistic setting-up of limits. One cannot decide in advance nor judge from outside in a particular instance whether an action is responsible or whether it is enthusiastic or legalistic. Bonhoeffer offers some criteria for self-examination, but even these cannot afford complete certainty nor form the basis of one's appeal for his acts:

Neither the limitation nor the extension of my responsibility must be based on a principle; the only possible basis for them is the concrete call of Jesus. If I know myself to be by character inclined towards reforming zeal, towards knowing better and towards fanaticism and unrestraint, then I shall be in danger of extending my responsibility in an arbitrary fashion and confusing my natural impulses with the call of Jesus. If I know myself to be prudent, cautious, diffident and law-abiding, then I shall have to guard against representing the restriction of my responsibility to a narrow field as the call of Jesus Christ. And, finally, it is never in thinking of myself, but it is always in thinking of the call of Christ, that I shall be set free for genuine responsibility.²⁵

Bonhoeffer enunciates a concept of the calling (vocation), then, which sets man in a limited context for expressing his vocational commitment. But he sees this limited context as only relative, so that the

²⁴Ibid., pp. 225f.

²⁵Ibid., p. 226.

responsible man is one whose ultimate commitment is to the call of Christ upon his whole life.

III. "NON-RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS"

Although Bonhoeffer's Ethics was itself incomplete and not put in finished form for publication by him, it was, nevertheless, a more or less systematic beginning by him of a major work. Such systematic efforts ceased with his imprisonment in April 1943. But for two years more he continued to write from his prison cell in the form of letters and brief treatises--most of which had to be smuggled out by friendly prison guards. But it is from the fragments of this period that some of his most intriguing concepts come. One phrase which captures the spirit of his search for the concreteness of the gospel's meaning for us today is his call for a "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts for a world come of age."²⁶ These terms are some of Bonhoeffer's best-known and most compelling utterances, and have been picked up by some non-Christian secularists and humanists (including some East German Marxists) as ammunition against the churches. The cautions of Bethge and Marty against such facile misinterpretations have already been noted above.²⁷ Yet for all their incompleteness,

²⁶The subject of "non-religious interpretations" and its corollary, a "world come of age" became the "theme" of several letters in 1944. The following dates and page numbers from Letters and Papers from Prison will show some of its development: May 5 (pp. 167ff); June 8 (pp. 195ff); July 8 (pp. 211ff); and July 16 (pp. 219f). Also, see Bonhoeffer's "Outline for a Book," Letters and Papers pp. 236ff for more on this theme.

²⁷Supra., 4, 10, 21.

these themes do have a bearing both on the development of Bonhoeffer's thought and on a model of the church built upon his theological insight.

Bonhoeffer was not alone in his attack upon "religion." The Barthian group had been outspoken in their opposition to "religion" as distinct from "faith," and Bonhoeffer praises Barth for this. Wherever churches are guilty of constructing or practicing a "religion," this might be taken as a criticism of those churches, but the Church is the preserver and living embodiment of faith in Christ. Hence the rejection of "religion," far from being a rejection of the Church of Christ is a ringing demand that the church be His Church. A brief summary of what the term "religion" means to Bonhoeffer will show the distinction between it and faith, and by implication, will point to some criteria for "non-religious interpretations."

First, religion is the cultivation of various forms of inwardness and individualism, abandoning the world to itself by calling for asceticism or "conversion." Second, it is a metaphysical search for the completion which the world is felt to need in some superstructure for being, or in a transcendent realm. Third, it is a practice which is relegated to some province or sphere of life, which sector is becoming smaller and more anachronistic in contemporary life. Fourth, it is a deus ex machina concept which, like a "spiritual chemist's shop" is used to create feelings of terrible need and then convince the hearer that religion will meet those needs. Bonhoeffer does not argue with the fact that human needs and the skillful handling of them will produce impressive and successful mass meetings, but such "religion" remains effective, if at all, in only a small province of life;

and the provincialism of much of Christian life today supports his contention.

Non-religious interpretation, then, must do the opposite of what "religion" does. It must point to God in Christ "not on the borders of life, but at its center,"²⁸ and "find God in what we do know, not in what we do not."²⁹ It means to participate in the suffering of Christ in and for the world. "Religions" invite man to look in his distress to the power of God, using Him as a deus ex machina. The God of the Bible is One who conquers power and space in the world by his weakness and suffering, and He calls upon man to share in his suffering for the world.

To some extent, then, the "coming of age" of the world was its discovery of the laws by which the world operates, and finding its autonomy within these laws. To that extent, the coming of age of the world was its abandonment of a false concept of God as deus ex machina at the boundary of existence where human powers give out. Therefore, the Christian should refrain from frontal attacks on the maturity of the world by attempting to force it back into a false sense of dependency upon the transcendent deus ex machina. Christians should rather affirm and support the maturity of the world, and see it as a preparation of the world to receive the God of the Bible.

On the other hand, to affirm the "world come of age" is not to gloss over its godlessness. "Now that it has come of age, the world

²⁸Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 165.

²⁹Ibid., p. 190.

is more godless, and perhaps it is for that very reason nearer to God than ever before,"³⁰ says Bonhoeffer. But he does not mean to confirm its godlessness; rather, he means that the rejection of the deus ex machina by the world clears the way for proclaiming to secular man the true God of the Bible and Christian faith.

Such a proclamation would require a concept of transcendence that is "this-worldly." By this term Bonhoeffer suggests that our relation to God is not a religious relationship to a supreme Being absolute in power and goodness. Rather, we encounter Jesus Christ, and are called to an exclusive concern for others, and find a concept of transcendence as "a new life for others through participation in the Being of God."³¹ Bonhoeffer concludes his sketchy first draft on the meaning of "this-worldly transcendence":

The transcendence consists not in tasks beyond our scope and power, but in the nearest [Thou] to hand. God in human form, not, as in other religions, in animal form--the monstrous, chaotic, remote and terrifying--nor yet in abstract form--the absolute, metaphysical, infinite, etc.--nor yet in the Greek divine-human of autonomous man, but man existing for others and hence the Crucified. A life based on the transcendent.³²

Hence "this-worldly transcendence" is a way of perceiving the transcendence of God as related to this world, not through projecting

³⁰Ibid., p. 238.

³¹Ibid., p. 238.

³²Ibid. Note that the word "Thou" which stands here in brackets reads "thing" in the Letters and Papers from Prison reference cited. Bethge, in the lectures already referred to calls this a terrible translation error, and replaces "thing" with "Thou." It should be noted that "Thou" is used here in the sense of the I-Thou relation, and, though capitalized, refers to the nearest human "Thou."

Him as the "object" of our perceptual faculties. It has nothing to do with an epistemological transcendence, but is this-worldly in the sense that God is known only in a concrete living for others, a participation in the being of Jesus for others. The Beyond becomes, therefore, not a metaphysical stopgap for our unanswered questions, but the "beyond in the midst of life" which addresses us in its concrete call to participate in Christ's "Being for others."

IV. NEW FORMS OF THE CHURCH NEEDED

If the Church is to speak relevantly to contemporary mankind--to the "world come of age"--without attempting to force man back into the immaturity of a "religion," she may well have to shed much of her religious and "weltanschauliche" trappings. She will have to remove the gospel from the dependence upon any particular world-view and relate it specifically to men who have learned to get along without "God" as a working hypothesis to answer life's questions. In a note accompanying the outline of a book on this subject (which he was not able to write), Bonhoeffer says:

The Church must get out of her stagnation. We must move out again into the open air of intellectual discussion with the world, and risk shocking people if we are to cut any ice. I feel obliged to tackle this question myself as one who, though a "modern" theologian, is still aware of the debt we owe to liberal theology.³³

In the outline itself he speaks of how the Church is true to herself only when she ceases to exist for herself and exists for

³³Ibid., p. 235.

humanity:

She must take her part in the social life of the world, not lording it over men, but helping and serving them. She must tell men, whatever their calling, what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others. And in particular, our own Church will have to take a strong line with the blasphemies of hybris, power-worship, envy and humbug, for these are the roots of evil. She will have to speak of moderation, purity, confidence, loyalty, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, content and modesty. She must not underestimate the importance of human example, which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus, and which is so important in the teaching of St. Paul. It is not abstract argument, but concrete example which gives her word emphasis and power.³⁴

This is consistent with Bonhoeffer's concept in the Ethics of "preparing the way."³⁵ Those who know of the coming of Christ are charged with immense responsibility in the needs of mankind: bread for the hungry, a roof for the homeless, justice for the dispossessed, fellowship for the lonely, order for the undisciplined and freedom for the slave. To allow these to go unserved would be blasphemy against God and one's neighbor, for precisely what is nearest to God is the need of one's neighbor. But these "social actions" are "things before the last." To have received bread is not the same as to have faith. Yet the Christian does them for the sake of the ultimate, so they do bear a relation to the ultimate. Still, the preparation of the way for Christ cannot simply be a program of social reform. Preparation of the way means repentance, but repentance means a concrete turning back--it demands action.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 239f.

³⁵Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 95f.

How the church is to express repentance and action remains a problem. Bonhoeffer gives evidence of his belief that the church must find her way anew in this section addressed to an infant nephew from his prison cell on the day of the child's baptism:

Today you are being baptized as a Christian. The ancient words of the Christian proclamation will be uttered over you, and the command of Jesus to baptize will be performed over you, without your knowing anything about it. But we too are being driven back to first principles. Atonement and redemption, regeneration, the Holy Ghost, the love of our enemies, the cross and resurrection, life in Christ and Christian discipleship--all these things have become so problematic and so remote that we hardly dare any more to speak of them. In the traditional rite and ceremonies we are groping after something new and revolutionary without being able to understand it or utter it yet. That is our own fault. During these years the Church has fought for self-preservation as though it were an end in itself, and has thereby lost its chance to speak a word of reconciliation to mankind and the world at large. . . . By the time you are grown up, the form of the Church will have changed beyond recognition.³⁶

To recognize the failure of the church does not mean for Bonhoeffer that we should abandon it in favor of the world's godlessness, or that we should "wear ourselves out in impotent zeal" as though an individual believer could single-handedly "be the church" in the world. He calls for the reinstatement of order and discipline--a "secret discipline" (Arkandisziplin) which, through the meditation of, and participation in, the suffering of Christ, leads to active, intelligent obedience. The church must not throw away its great terms such as "creation," "fall," "atonement," "repentance," and "last things." But neither does she dare profane them by indiscriminate mouthing of

³⁶Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, pp. 187f.

them unless they can be related relevantly to man in the secularized world. In fact, it is the church's attempt to defend herself against the secular that has cost her the present opportunity to speak the reconciling word to the secular world. Therefore she must undergo purgation in order to reclaim the ability to speak with force and power--not of herself, but of Christ's Lordship in the world. Bonhoeffer evaluates the church's situation for his time:

So our traditional language must perforce become powerless and remain silent, and our Christianity today will be confined to praying for and doing right by our fellow men. Christian thinking, speaking and organization must be reborn out of this praying and this action. . . . But the day will come when men will be called again to utter the word of God with such power as will change and renew the world.³⁷

The concept of the church which Bonhoeffer is pushing for at the end of his career is in many ways reminiscent of his beginning concepts in The Communion of the Saints. It is a recognition of the fact that the church is both a means to an end and an end in itself. As an end itself, the church stands in the place of Christ as his body. Yet Christ existed not for His own sake, but wholly for the sake of the world; therefore, the church is also a means of expressing the unlimited scope of the message of Christ. But again, "it is precisely this unlimited scope of the message of Christ which, in turn, is a summons into the limited domain of the congregation."³⁸ Both Catholicism and the Reformation churches are in danger of misunderstanding the dynamic of the church. Catholicism in regarding the Church essentially as an end in itself tends to neglect the divine

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., p. 267.

mandate of the proclamation of the word. The Reformation devotes so much attention to the mandate of the proclamation of the word that it almost entirely neglects the proper domain and function of the Church as an end in herself (which end is, of course, her existence for the sake of the world). Bonhoeffer's extended commentary on Protestantism is helpful for pointing out the great significance he placed upon the order and discipline of the gathered congregation:

One need only call to mind the liturgical poverty and uncertainty of our present-day Protestant services, the feebleness of our ecclesiastical organization and law, the almost complete absence of any genuine ecclesiastical discipline, and the inability of most Protestants even to understand the significance of such disciplinary practices as spiritual exercises, asceticism, meditation and contemplation. One need only consider the general uncertainty about the special functions of the clergy, or the startlingly confused or presumptuous attitude of countless Protestant Christians towards those Christians who refuse to take oaths, those Christians who refuse to perform military service, etc., and one cannot help perceiving at once where the Protestant Church is at fault. Exclusive interest in the divine mandate of proclamation, and, together with this, interest in the Church's mission in the world, has resulted in failure to perceive the inner connexion between this mission and the Church's internal functions. This failure has necessarily detracted from the power, the abundance and the fullness of the proclamation itself, because the proclamation finds no fertile soil.³⁹

This emphasis upon the Church's "internal functions" is not to minimize her role in the life of the world. Perhaps the role of the church in the affairs of the secular world are much more emphasized in Bonhoeffer's later writing. Yet it is clear from this late commentary that he never ceased to see the gathered community of order and discipline as a sine qua non of "being the church."

³⁹Ibid.

V. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND ACTION

The examination of Bonhoeffer's life and his theological contribution gives support to Bethge's observation that "with Bonhoeffer, actions and life comment on his sayings and the words on his actions, in an extraordinary degree."⁴⁰ Precisely in this ability to make the gospel message relevant to contemporary life situations lies the evidence for the thesis that Dietrich Bonhoeffer has in fact "pointed the way" for the contemporary church. With a theological basis grounded in Christ, and a personal demonstration of free and responsible action in the midst of complexities and ambiguities which mark contemporary urban secular life, he has presented the church with a cause for renewed confidence in the relevance of Jesus Christ for "man come of age." With the severest critics of the church, he called into question the failure of outmoded images of her form and her mission. But against her "cultured despisers" and cynical "outsiders" he protested in the name of ultimate reality for what is ontologically true in Christian faith and indispensable to an adequate understanding of, and response to, the world.

Against the image of the church as the defender of doctrine, he showed that preservation of the Word alone could lead to a "positivism of revelation" in which the church's rigid demands that "man come of age" must simply accept the dogmatic formulations of the church's doctrines could render them irrelevant--not because the doctrines are not

⁴⁰Bethge, "The Challenge..." p. 26.

true, but because we have failed to "prepare the way" for secular man to hear the word by showing how they apply to contemporary situations. Where institutionalism was seen to be the church's way of preserving herself (whether in the betrayal of the gospel through "practical" compromises with the Nazis, or whether in the "restorationist tendencies" in the Confessing Church), he offered the reminder that the church's mission is not to preserve herself, but to be the body of Christ--i.e., "Christ existing for others." If she fails at this, God is capable of giving her task to others. Whenever Christian community as participation in the life of the church was threatened by the sentimental notion of having to "like each other," he pointed out that coming together with such illusions is more appropriate to a "society" and not to the body of Christ--that indeed the encounter with the neighbor who reminds me of my status as a sinner under God's judgment and grace may be anything but pleasant.

Constructively, Bonhoeffer would not be in agreement with those who would abandon the church because of the failures in her self-image. Rather, he affirms that precisely in the fellowship of sinners, of which the empirical church is comprised, is to be found the sanc-torum communio, the communion of saints! This is not something which we prove; it is a faith-claim. And the calling of the man of faith is to involve himself here--gathering to hear the proclamation of the Word as the church alone preserves and proclaims it, and going forth in obedient response to live his life in the world as a witness there that the world is reconciled in Jesus Christ.

So the image of the church which emerges from a study of Bonhoeffer is the twofold one of gathering and scattering. For the present purposes, these two foci will be called "order" and "mission." The church as order is the congregation of those who assemble to hear the Word and to celebrate their being as the People of God--through worship, study, discipline, sharing, and giving and receiving accountability before the Christian brethren for our lives in the world. The church as mission is the going forth to serve the world in the name of Christ, strengthened for mission by participation in His body--creating structures of justice in which all men are set free to live abundantly, and pronouncing the witness of reconciliation by word and deed wherever men are unaware of being reconciled. Out of this image the "model for the contemporary church" as described in the final chapter is built. The life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer serves exceedingly well for its validation.

CHAPTER V

A MODEL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH AS PREFIGURED IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

This study has pointed to the widespread acclaim of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from a broad spectrum of commentators. It was noted earlier that his appeal to contemporary men both within and outside the church is a testimony to the relevance for the present age of the bold, daring witness which his life and thought represent. Although there is continuing debate as to the interpretation which should be made of some of his late, unsystematic writings, the evidence of this study seems to support the conclusion that Bonhoeffer continued to understand himself to be a committed churchman.

For Bonhoeffer, being a committed churchman meant, however, that one must be forever open to the question of what his "being the church" might call for in the context of his own historical situation. In this respect, Bonhoeffer's concept of the church seemed to require drastic rethinking of some of the forms the church had taken, and the forging of new models for its institutional manifestation. But since his own rethinking was brought to an untimely conclusion in martyrdom, Bonhoeffer was only able, to use Godsey's words again, to "point the way" in the direction of models that would affirm the maturity of contemporary secular man while preserving the authenticity of the gospel.

The constructive task of this study was to propose a model for the contemporary church which would satisfy the criteria of relevance and fidelity which Bonhoeffer has articulated. A brief resume is offered first, growing out of the study of Bonhoeffer's life and thought, which crystallizes the requirements which must be met if the church is adequately to serve the "world come of age" and faithfully represent the body of Christ. After the summary of criteria and the proposal of the model, some suggestions for implementation of the model have been included also.

I. CRITERIA FOR THE MODEL SUGGESTED BY THE STUDY

A. Sociological Concern: The Institutional Manifestation

One of Bonhoeffer's earliest concerns was for the visible nature of the body of Christ. Against all individualistic emphases and privatistic morality, he pointed to the corporate character of the communion of saints. He stressed the necessity for the visible gathering of the faithful. In claiming for the church the benefits of the discipline of sociology, Bonhoeffer was careful, however, not to diminish the claims of the church to be based in revelation. His balanced perspective has opened the way for the church to reappraise its sociological and institutional manifestations without compromising its dogmatic foundations.

The sociological concern was present in Bonhoeffer's life and thought throughout his career, including the experiment with the "new monasticism" of the "House of Brethren," where even a corporate style

of Christian community in a residence situation was explored. The emphasis was not, however, upon withdrawal from the world, but upon more effective ways to be present to it.

It is a characteristic of the body of Christ, then, that they gather together on more or less frequent occasions. But what they do when they gather is of utmost significance also. A primary purpose for gathering is for the celebration of the life to which the body has been called. This is epitomized in the Eucharist, but the worship service itself is such a celebration. Moreover, the community is called together to stand before the Word, and receive its message for their own time and circumstance. This includes the imaginative application of the historic faith to concrete situations in the contemporary world.

The gathering of the visible church is for two primary purposes, then: 1) the cultic acts of appropriating and celebrating the life of faith, and 2) the educative task of receiving, interpreting, and rearticulating the faith for contemporary man. Bonhoeffer was critical of the church's performance in both of these functions. He complained of the poverty of Protestant liturgy, and he criticized the irrelevance of the catechism. He was also critical of the church's abdication to the state in the education of clergy, and of the evasiveness and timidity of Christians who took refuge from fierce debate of theological issues on their merit by simply pointing to the authority of church teaching.

B. Secular Relevance: The Church in Mission

Bonhoeffer has been prominent in the struggle to remove the dichotomy between "sacred" and "secular." He knew the dangers of self-idolatry which beset the man of no faith who is apt to land in a secularism which replaces God with man's own achievements. Yet he seemed to be more favorably disposed toward the "secularist" than the professed Christian who used "God" as a stopgap for his unsolved problems and a rationalization for his own presuppositions and prejudices.

Christian faith must be relevant to this world, Bonhoeffer demanded, for this is the world pronounced good by its Creator and redeemed by him. This meant for Bonhoeffer that the church must not be content with mere generalizations on social issues such as "war," but it must make concrete pronouncements about specific wars and whether Christians should or should not participate in them. Moreover, the church is called to deeds of social service, especially in behalf of those who are victims of the injustice in the society. Finally, the church must bear witness to the world that it has been redeemed by Christ and is free to accept his reconciliation. In this latter regard, Bonhoeffer does not sentimentalize God's love for man by setting the stamp of approval on "secular" man's godlessness. But he does affirm from his prison cell that secular men--who have learned to live courageously without the "God-hypothesis"--often seem more ready to receive the gospel than many in the churches.

The dynamic characteristic which emerges from a study of Bonhoeffer is of the People of God--the church--the gathering and

scattering ones who accept, celebrate and embody the living presence of Christ and become his re-presentation to contemporary man. The model which follows employs the dynamic of gathering and scattering, and suggests some criteria for evaluating the relevance of what the community does when it gathers and the nature of its mission as it scatters to give its life to the world.

This model draws heavily upon the articulation by the faculty of the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago, Illinois, of what the church should be. The selection of the Institute's model is a considered one. Not only have Bonhoeffer's life and theology strongly influenced the Ecumenical Institute,¹ but theirs seems to be an outstanding example of theology lived and taught in lucid awareness of the demands and possibilities of the times. The model is not an elaboration of the life-style of the corporate community of the Institute in Chicago, but is a proposal of the criteria by which any community which calls itself "church" (e.g., a local congregation) might evaluate its "gathering" and "scattering."

In addition to the Ecumenical Institute, experimental ventures by the Woodland Hills, California Methodist Church have illuminated the model, giving further testimony of its viability in a local

¹The Institute's basic curriculum lists Bonhoeffer as one of the six theologians whose work constitute the framework for an understanding of contemporary theology. An "advanced" course is offered dealing exclusively with Bonhoeffer. As a testimony to his importance a seminar room at their Chicago campus is named the "Bonhoeffer Room."

congregational setting. Two papers by William Steel,² pastor of that church, suggest how institutional application of certain features of the model might be accomplished.

One final supportive datum is in order. The implementation section below proposes a broad ecumenical base for a united witness of the body of Christ in the secular order. Following upon two recent clergy and lay colloquies conducted in the Los Angeles area by the Ecumenical Institute, several ecumenical cleric cadres have been formed. The participants are currently engaged in a process of pedagogical preparation, and a few ecumenical schools of lay theology are being scheduled. While these experiments are too new to have produced conclusive results, the signs are encouraging. These are at least preliminary indications that Bonhoeffer's "pointing of the way" and the willingness of contemporary churchmen to pick up the task are moving the church toward viable new models of what it means to be the body of Christ, existing for others.

II. THE MODEL

A. The Gathered Church: The Church as Order

Bonhoeffer's insistence upon the necessity for the visible gathering together of the body of Christ in the empirical church has

²William Steel, "A Functional View of the Church," and "The Skeleton Crew/Task Force Approach to Church Administration." Included herein as Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

been pointed out several times already.³ At the same time, he was severely critical of many of the practices of the empirical church when it does gather. He was unhappy with the poverty of Protestant liturgy. In response to the anachronism of the religious instruction of candidates for confirmation, he rewrote the catechism, and livened up his confirmation classes with, for example, trips to the opera with his class of delinquent and near-delinquent boys. It would hardly be fair to call these experiments definitive of Bonhoeffer's concept of Christian education. It is fair to say that in worship and in education, he felt the church was inadequate in her performance. Unfortunately, he left hardly any constructive proposals for how the gathered community should organize or execute these functions. That he did give some thought to these problems is clear from the "Outline for a Book"⁴ which was never written. He insisted on a reinterpretation of the classical doctrines--obviously a task of serious Christian education--and demanded that Christians be able to articulate their meaning in a relevant vocabulary without the "clerical subterfuge" of hiding behind the statement that "it's the church's faith, not mine." The sections which follow suggest some criteria for the cultic and educative functions of the gathered community which, hopefully, will fulfill the criteria implied by Bonhoeffer, marking it as the People of God.

³Supra., 10, 36, 41, 99, 100.

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Macmillan 1962) pp. 236-240.

Cultus. On the subject of cultus in his outline, Bonhoeffer left only the parenthetical note: ("Details to follow later, in particular on cultus and religion.")⁵ Since the temptation to practice a "religion" is probably greatest in the cultic life of the church, it would no doubt be instructive to see how Bonhoeffer would suggest the church avoid this pitfall.

The cultic, or symbolic dimension of life in the gathered community of Christian people is expressed in corporate worship. Because worship is a symbolic and representational activity, it is always subject to misunderstanding. Two of the most common misunderstandings are on the one hand, a literalism which makes of the symbolic activity the setting in which "man meets God"; or, on the other hand, a rationalism which rejects worship altogether (on the basis of a different kind of literalism) because of a partially correct understanding that man cannot "change the mind of God" (or the course of natural law) through the importuning of prayer and ritual. The first mistake would be to practice a "religion" in the sense of religion as rejected by Bonhoeffer. The second misunderstanding stems from a failure to see any other purpose of worship than the manipulation of God--a practice which is rejected. To restore meaning to corporate worship, it will be necessary to educate churchmen in what the body of Christ is doing when it worships.

In an earlier chapter, Bonhoeffer's point was noted that there began in about the thirteenth century a process of secularization in

⁵Ibid., p. 238.

the Western world, culminating in the autonomy of science, technology, and most other disciplines without the necessity of a "God hypothesis." The church has viewed most of the movements of the secular world as inimical to faith, and has energetically resisted the secularizing process. At the same time, in defending the faith, the church has preserved many anachronistic trappings in which the faith was clothed for communicating in previous centuries to people of a different world-view from that of contemporary man. Three typical responses of modern men to the conflict between church and world may be noted: to abandon the church and religion as an immature phase of man's adolescence between magic and enlightenment; to entrench themselves through a sacri-ficium intelligentia in an archaic world-view and hold onto it as a part of the content of faith; or to "liberalize" the content of the message to make it consonant with the modern world-view. Of course these are over-simplifications, and do not exhaust the options, but a brief look at most worship resource books (prayerbooks, hymnals and books of worship), or the attendance upon most church services, will disclose the fact that to the uninformed churchgoer it is hardly self-evident from going through the service what it is the church understands itself to be.

The extremes of abandoning corporate worship or defiantly clinging to archaic words and patterns which are at variance with contemporary man's understanding are both unacceptable for the contemporary church. But merely to update the language is at best only a partial solution to the problem of worshiping congregations of men and women who need to understand what relevance this cultic activity has

for contemporary life. The question could be raised whether it was not just such partial updating which contributed to the subjective, individualistic and often sentimental tone of much Protestant worship. When the words are understandable and not contradictory to reason, yet the whole dynamic of the service is not explained, it is not difficult to see how an individual would infer that the intent of the service is to edify, inspire and precipitate moral conduct. If there is added to this shallow view the reinforcement of the "spectator" attitude of the congregation by focusing on a choir as "musical performers," and if the mark of an appropriate sermon is its wit and its power to "move" its hearers, then the sense of participation in a great enactment of the drama of their salvation by the People of God is in serious jeopardy.

Worship as Symbolic Activity. Man is a symbol-making creature. To be human requires that one use symbols. Using Tillich's understanding that a symbol both "points to something beyond itself" and that it "participates in the reality of that for which it stands,"⁶ some misconceptions may be avoided. When the body of Christ is engaged in Christian worship, it is expressing something about reality which is unsynonymous with the literal interpretation of its words and actions. As symbolic activity, worship participates in the reality of life to which it points, but it is not, therefore, a "higher form" of reality nor "closer to" reality than other human activity. Pursuing

⁶Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 239.

Tillich's criteria for adequacy of symbols a basis is formed for judging the adequacy of a worship service to declare the Christian's understanding of life before God:

The truth of a religious symbol has nothing to do with the truth of the empirical assertions involved in it, be they physical, psychological, or historical. A religious symbol possesses some truth if it adequately expresses the correlation of revelation in which some person stands. A religious symbol is true if it adequately expresses the correlation of some person with final revelation. A religious symbol can die only if the correlation of which it is an adequate expression dies. This occurs whenever the revelatory situation changes and former symbols become obsolete. The history of religion, right up to our own time, is full of dead symbols which have been killed not by a scientific criticism of assumed superstitions but by a religious criticism of religion. The judgment that a religious symbol is true is identical with the judgment that the revelation of which it is the adequate expression is true. This double meaning of the truth of a symbol must be kept in mind. A symbol has truth: it is adequate to the revelation it expresses. A symbol is true: it is the expression of a true revelation.⁷

A Christian worship service is not, then, the occasion of God's salvation of man. It is the community's celebration and reenactment of the fact that God has claimed and redeemed mankind unto himself. The Christian does not, therefore, go to worship in search of "religious feelings" to be experienced or of "religious ideas" to which he can assent, if he properly understands corporate worship of God. As Mathews phrases it:

Christian worship is the response of the total man precisely because it involves the core of the self. The question put to the worshipper is not how do you feel or

⁷Ibid., p. 240.

what do you know, but who do you choose to be in the light of God's activity in Christ?⁸

This implies that there is a rationale for the structure and content of a Christian liturgy. But this rationale needs to be understood on the part of the worshipers, and every Christian should have the opportunity to have a thorough interpretation of what the worship service is intended to symbolize. In fact, the churchman should be required to receive such interpretation at the outset of his mature entry into the church, and opportunity should be given for frequent, continuing education in what worship is, even as the church continues worshipping. How this interpretive task is to be carried out is the problem of the church leadership in each place. That it must be done is essential if the church is to escape irrelevance and individualism in the conduct of corporate worship. The church's cultic life is in need of searching scrutiny to see if it is communicating what Christian worship should communicate, or whether it invites inwardness and subjectivism, escape from reality, or "cheap grace" which is only illusion and not really relevant to the world as it is. Secular man is perhaps open in a new way to the art forms, to myth and to symbol as vehicles to share in the experience of a reality which is not reducible to a literal, verbal level. So-called "secular" art and drama, psychology, and numerous other fields of human activity employ these symbolic functions. This should give encouragement to the

⁸Joseph Wesley Mathews, Common Worship in the Christian Faith and Life Community (Nashville: The Board of Education of The Methodist Church, 1962).

experimentation in liturgical jazz, bodily motion, and other media for involving the whole man in a whole response enacted as worship. But unless some such objective criteria as those offered here are used as checkpoints, there is every reason to fear that the experimenter may land precisely back in the image of worship as the "generation of feelings" and of the "spectator" attitude by the worshiper. For even if in the novelty of the medium (and even perhaps in the excellence of its employment) the congregation become pleased and excited by the experience, it does not necessarily follow that they have understood themselves to have faced their own sinfulness and forgiveness, to have thankfully received the Word, and to have been sent forth as the dedicated ones to serve God and man.

The Hebrews did not invent the myths by which they interpreted the reality they knew, but they were able to interpret them in accordance with the reality of life as given by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. St. Paul was able to use the myths and language of the non-Christians to whom he preached (e.g., the Acts 17 account of his speech to the Athenians), but he always gave a clearly Christian interpretation to the experience of men of the world. But these fathers had to make a clear distinction between the world's misunderstanding of its own experience⁹ and the revelation of God as delivered to His people. Just so, the contemporary church must find a way to communicate in the idiom of the present time, but without confusing

⁹Cf. The scathing Old Testament proscriptions against Baalistic practices and Paul's censure of Christians who failed to make proper distinctions between the gospel and Gnosticism.

her message with that of the godlessness of the people whose language she understands and employs even better than the world knows itself. Even the "old forms" and the "old words" of the Fathers may be retained for some occasions as links with our heritage. But when employed, they may need more interpretation than "secular" idiom does.

Education. Bonhoeffer spoke in his first major work, The Communion of Saints, of the role of the church to carry within itself those toward whom God's intention for salvation has been symbolized in baptism even before they are aware of its meaning. His concern for and his work with those of confirmation age has already been alluded to, as well as his call for the church in Germany to assume a larger share of the education of its clergy. In all these concerns, as well as in his challenge of the church to expose herself to fierce and open debate with science, philosophy, and with the secular order, there is implied a responsibility of the church for the task of educating her people in matters of the Christian tradition. Still another thrust is implied when Bonhoeffer--for all his affirmation of the world's "maturity"--declares that the church must not simply baptize the godlessness of the secular world which has learned to live without the "God-hypothesis," but the church must understand the world better than the world understands itself. This implies that if the church is to fulfill its being as the body of Christ--"being there for others"--it must know the world it is addressing. Herein lies the twofold task of church education: education of the members in the theological realities of the tradition, and education in the realities

of the world in which contemporary man lives.

An adequate model for the contemporary church, therefore, includes the assumption that the gathered community will give much serious consideration to the task of informing itself of these realities and devising strategies for effectively projecting their implications into the secular sphere. When a proper appreciation of the scope of this task and an appropriate understanding of the meaning of corporate worship reaches the level of conscious awareness of churchmen, it will be readily apparent that this educative function cannot be accomplished in a weekly half-hour sermon, and that this is not the place for undertaking it.

The statistics of Sunday schools reveal such a drastic dropout rate as the age scale is ascended, that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that even within the church, Sunday school is considered "kid's stuff." This is not to minimize nor overlook the emergence of promising new experiments in adult education in week-end seminars, week-night courses of limited scope and duration, and special conferences on specific concerns. On the contrary, such new methods may well be far more appropriate to contemporary patterns than an interminable commitment to an "adult Sunday school class." Adults who as parents and as citizens of the secular world have both the opportunity and the responsibility for determining the shape and course of contemporary culture, have particular need for depth understanding of the relevance of Christian theology to the contemporary situation. In light of the fact that the clergy must assume a heavy responsibility in their specialty, theology, if laymen are to have access to adequate

theological education, then adult education should be scheduled for a time when the clergy are not involved in the leading of worship.

By the appellation "teaching elder" the church has often pointed to the important pedagogical role of its clergy. The clergyman must not only be informed in his own right, but he must possess (or develop) the skills for putting across to the rest of the church the knowledge they need for appropriating and articulating the gospel in their life situation. This may require less focus on the establishment of "friendly relationships" with as many parishioners as possible in order to free more time for structured groups of study and discipline which offer life to the participants and enable them to become articulate in the life-giving Word in their spheres of influence. It will require a certain psychological wisdom to listen--especially for the "question behind the question" of many who are trying out an academic exercise in Christian thought, but may not yet have encountered the life-and-death issue of whether or not to be a man or woman of faith. It means the Christian pedagogue must be a "surgeon of the spirit"--breaking through the illusions in which many people live--but remembering that the surgeon employs the knife as a means of preserving life, not as an instrument of death. As a pedagogue, the clergyman must be open himself--listening, searching, and facing reality. But the small class in which sober study and strategy are the major concerns should not be turned into a sounding board for the members' personal problems. There is, of course, a need for such sensitivity and concern within the Christian community. But if the church is to learn to serve others she must avoid continual introspec-

tive concern for her own problems, and learn to look outside herself to the needs of the world.

A curriculum for the educational program of a relevant church in the contemporary situation must make the theological understanding out of which the church operates utterly clear. Attention needs to be given to how to transmit this theological understanding to the world intelligibly. Each member of the body should be his own theologian, even though he has to admit that there are some questions to which he does not have answers. This implies that theology should address itself to life, and that relevant theology today is that which speaks to life as contemporary man experiences it.

The two areas of concern to church curricula are the study of the tradition of the church (theological) and the study of the world within which theology is addressed (cultural studies). While judgment might vary widely as to what works of which theologians should make up the content of course curricula, the basic exposition of essential Christian doctrine should be assembled in rather brief and manageable segments.¹⁰ These courses could be offered sequentially and repeated occasionally to include newcomers and persons who have not previously enrolled. At least a three or four year sequence could be planned, and those who proceeded that far would have little difficulty in

¹⁰Although no argument is offered here for the curriculum of the Ecumenical Institute as the only appropriate one, they have, nevertheless, devised curricula and pedagogical methodologies for several brief but amazingly comprehensive seminar courses on theology and culture. Information on the course offerings may be obtained by writing to the Institute.

seeing fruitful possibilities for other "advanced" and specialized study in theology and culture.

B. The Scattered Church: The Church as Mission

In the preceding chapter,¹¹ Bonhoeffer's development of his concept of the calling is seen to imply that for the Christian to be in mission to the world requires more than merely "doing his job" and fulfilling the cultural expectation required of his occupational and family roles. He is responsible not only within the structures of civilization, he is also responsible for shaping the structures themselves. Furthermore, as Bonhoeffer pointed out to the German churches relative to the "Jewish question," the church is responsible for those who fall out of the culture's structures of justice--both to give aid and to plead their cause for justice in the civil sphere. But if these requirements of the body of Christ are to be more than theoretical abstractions, and if their implementation is to be based on more than the haphazard expectation that enough "individual Christians" spaced throughout the secular world will accomplish them through their responsible choices, then some mode of corporate, intentional decision-making by the body of Christ is needed that will have an impact on the secular world.

To fulfill her mission in the secular world, then, the church must not simply wait for her teaching to take effect through the rippling effect of individual Christians' moral example. Yet the

¹¹Supra., pp. 90f.

church does not rule the world either; so her direct address to the secular order must come through united, disciplined, and well-planned corporate action of cadres of her membership who are bound to one another and to Jesus Christ in their mission of serving, suffering love. A recent articulation of such a posture of obedience and confident service was pronounced by the Dean of the Ecumenical Institute, Joseph Mathews, when he said--in substance--that the man of unfaith understands himself to have been hurled into the twentieth century by a sequence of historical accidents. The man of faith understands himself to have been sent to this time and place as mission to this age.¹² Such audacity--born not of egotism or self-idolatry, but of humble obedience to the call of Jesus Christ--seems consistent with Bonhoeffer's challenge to radical involvement in shaping and directing the course of the secular world. But intelligent and appropriate involvement may not be left either to chance or to sporadic and zealous campaigns of re-action to situations that have already erupted. The church has often been caught in a squeeze of contradictory charges, partly because it had no clear image of its own role in the secular sphere. When the church has failed to be actively involved in social issues, it has been charged with hypocrisy and betrayal of its own preaching; when it has taken an active role, it has been charged with meddling in "politics" where it "has no place." The church may not allow the world to circumscribe for it its "place," but it needs to

¹²Joseph Mathews, in a lecture to clergymen at University Methodist Church, Los Angeles, November 15, 1965.

have a clear vision of its own role which it can articulate non-defensively and act upon courageously. This requires depth study, realistic planning, corporate commitment and solidarity, and internal structures of covenant (or rule), discipline (or mutual accountability), and a life-style which reflects the mood of the worship service, namely, humility, gratitude, and compassion. What this implies for a model of the church is a recovery of church structures which brings to conscious awareness the meaning of the implicit covenants that church membership presupposes, and a means of giving and receiving accountability in the fellowship for how the members live before the Lord in response to these covenants. How the church might live its mission in the twofold task of serving mankind through structuring and sustaining justice and through witnessing love is the subject of the next two subsections.

Justing Love. Bonhoeffer knew, as his section on "The Day Alone"¹³ testifies, that the Christian may expect to live most of his life in a setting that is either indifferent or perhaps hostile to the Christian faith. But even here, he need not be "alone" in the sense of isolation from a sustaining community, if the congregation of which he is a part has grasped the meaning of corporateness and of their interdependence as members of the body of Christ. The church needs to see itself as a covenanted community for the purpose of bearing one another's burdens. But this is more than just "fellow

¹³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, (New York: Harper & Brothers 1954), pp. 76-89.

feeling." The task is not to "give one another acceptance"--a Christian knows already that he is accepted in Christ. But Christians are bearers of this Word to one another, and therefore do not need to rely upon their own dubious self-assurances in time of crisis. Instead, they may share their joys and their agonies, receiving strength from the knowledge that when one experiences joy, all rejoice with him, and when one faces an agonizing decision, all are bearing with him and supporting him. Conversely, the Christian who knows himself to be in covenant with his Lord and with fellow Christians will expect them to expect him to be faithful in his decision-making--even within the limits of his finite ability to "know all the facts" in advance.

Furthermore, Christians who decide to live explicitly before the covenant implied in church membership--to be faithful in all of life--will begin to see connections between their various occupational roles. In addition, they will be able to develop strategies for reaching and influencing key persons not in the covenant community but whose sympathies make them "allies" in the cause of creating and sustaining structures of justice that set men free in the secular order--"preparing the way" for non-Christian secular man to receive the life-giving message that the secular order also stands under God's judgment and grace.

Such intentional, history-shaping commitment to the structures of justice in the secular order must be made consciously and explicitly and include provision for regular giving and receiving of accountability by the members for their performance in the mission. This accountability will be rendered, of course, in the context of the

gathered community--in the same context wherein the community reenacts its self-understanding in the service of worship, and re-appropriates the Word of forgiveness and is sent forth again to be the obedient ones. The understanding of the covenant relationship between God and His People is all but submerged in the individualistic over-emphasis in much of the church's life today. Even when covenants are discussed in the church, they often are treated more as intellectual abstractions than as living characteristics of the church's corporate life. There is a danger, of course, that revival of "covenant groups" within the church will lead to a false pietism which Bonhoeffer warned against in The Communion of Saints--the assumption that such groups represent the "true church within the church." Such pietism must be avoided, but the fear of it need not intimidate the church to the extent that she continually fails to expect or to demand the radical kind of obedience to which the People of God are called. Piosity can be avoided if the community is held before the Word which reminds it of its own faithlessness and sin, and if it is clear that obedience does not gain for the obedient ones a greater measure of God's love. Rather, as the bearers of the Word of His reconciliation, His people have no other response to make except the joyful, suffering response of proclaiming and embodying this word in history.

A model for the contemporary church, then, must account for a dynamic and concrete expression of God's intention for the whole world--its reconciliation unto Himself. Therefore, its members must have the opportunity to declare their obedient acceptance of this mission of bearing responsibility for actualizing this Word in

history. There are many prototypes for corporate acknowledgement of and accountability for covenants throughout the tradition from Old Testament times down through contemporary "renewal groups." Many of them would have features inappropriate to the contemporary scene, and a covenant which reflects the life of a given community must, to some extent, be composed by or adapted for that community. No rigid construct is offered here, but some criteria can be suggested by which a corporate rule (or discipline, or covenant) may be judged.

The rule of the community should be fixed, so that there is utter clarity by the members about what their commitment is and for what they are accountable. Yet it must be flexible; for the discipline is always for the mission and is never, therefore, an end in itself. Since the mission can vary in its concrete demands, the rule must be adaptable to fit the mission. There must be a construct for accountability; but accountability may never deprive a member of his freedom. Bonhoeffer's insight applies that in actual life decisions one may have to violate one valid claim in order to be faithful to a higher one. The community's rule must be explicit in order to avoid the irresponsibility and subjectivism of having to "interpret" for oneself the vague abstractions of moral principles. Yet one who is obedient to a corporate rule only as a way of rendering concrete obedience to the call of Christ is one who knows that the One who issues the call may in a concrete situation demand the sacrifice of even the "rule" to a higher claim. (Bonhoeffer's positive valuation of the state and of the citizen's duty to obey the government was valid; but when that duty came in conflict with the demand to follow Christ, he had to

break that law.)

Accountability under the Christian covenant includes all areas of responsible life. Worship, though its frequency is arbitrary, is the central activity around which life is centered, for it is that reference activity which dramatizes and illuminates the totality of life; hence no Christian is exempt from the necessity to worship together as the church. Study is necessary for any who would have command of the complexities of modern life, and serious, organized study will be included in the rule. Time is filled with meaning when the community sees it as the setting within which the mission is projected; hence men of faith will not waste it idly--even when they are called to create images of meaningful leisure. Goods and money are given the man of faith as to a steward; and even the monastic vow of poverty is a valid symbol if interpreted to mean that not a cent of what is given may be spent in a manner inconsistent with the mission. Thus men and women of faith control their money rather than being swallowed up by economic demands. All of these areas of accountability are subjected to the demands of the mission of the church which is to impact the world with the good news that man is free from the tyranny of the created order and is given the world as God's good creation to rule over, to enjoy, and to subject to the will of God.

A community of faith which accepts the responsibility for the world knows that it is accountable before God and to one another. But accountability (giving or receiving it) is not flagellation of oneself or the brother. It is a way of turning one's own hidden, subjective guilt out into the objective light of the gospel of Jesus Christ where

it can be acknowledged and forgiven, delivering each one back into his life situation as a free, received and responsible person. By this kind of self-discipline and purgation in obedient response to the judgment and grace of God in Jesus Christ, the historical community who are His body represent the reality of the Incarnation as a living truth which is still a present possibility for all mankind. In rendering her obedience and purging from her own midst those sins which enslave men in society the church becomes what H. Richard Niebuhr calls a "social pioneer," and in this role she renders representational responsibility for the entire society. That is, the church becomes a direct demonstration and embodiment of love of God and neighbor, rather than simply a place where the commands are repeated. Moreover, this demonstration of responsible living may allow God to treat society "as if all had repented," to use Bonhoeffer's (biblical) figure.¹⁴

Perhaps a more "this-worldly" way of stating this concept is that the church becomes through this kind of obedience a prototype for humanness to project before contemporary man; and this example, wisely and confidently pressed forward into the secular sphere as a pattern of justice, may become the instrumentality through which new images of humanness are appropriated by "secular" man. Of course secular man will never accept the life style of the Christian community in toto until the Kingdom of God is realized universally; but as participants in the secular order, Christians can help shape the structures of

¹⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) pp. 83f.

justice in the secular sphere. Yet the church's effectiveness in the secular world will be directly proportional to its ability to approximate in its own life the quality of human community which it espouses and to which the Lord calls all men. The integrity of the church's own life and example will be of utmost significance to the success of its mission of witnessing love, to which attention is now directed.

Witnessing Love. Bonhoeffer pointed out in the essay on the "Jewish Question" in 1933,¹⁵ that the church has an obligation to give aid to the victims of injustice in the state. His later thought went even further, to call the church and churchmen to involvement in the secular structures themselves as a way of creating a just order. This was not to be a clericalization of the world, but a responsible participation in and affirmation of its relative (though genuine) autonomy. But the church's mission in the structures of justice is its participation in the penultimate. Though it has significance for the ultimate mission and is therefore a genuine responsibility, it is still a "preparing of the way" for the ultimate reality of man's justification and reconciliation in Christ. To keep this awareness before itself helps the church to be constantly reminded of the other aspect of its mission, namely, that of witnessing love.

Witnessing love is that activity wherein the body of Christ announces the Word without which man has no reliable hope: that in Jesus Christ, God has received, approved and reconciled all men unto

¹⁵Supra., p. 70.

Himself. This is a Word which is not used to browbeat men into intellectual assent to clerical dogmas. It is a witness which calls for its bearers to suffer with and to represent the continuation of the presence of the Christ-truth in history. It is the offer of the possibility for others to receive this truth, to pick up their own cross, and to assume with joy the "easy yoke" of Christ. Witness does not mean, Bonhoeffer has pointed out, that the church will indiscriminately evangelize by throwing open her doors to offer "cheap grace," making her own self-perpetuation her primary mission and lowering the "price" of church membership to lure the masses in. Witnessing love does mean the willingness and continual alertness to every opportunity to announce to despairing mankind the Word of his reconciliation and the open hand of fellowship for all who would receive this Word as the truth for their own lives.

The church must believe that God will not leave himself without a witness, and that He will choose how he will use its witness to accomplish his purposes. But the church will not make expansion of membership its primary goal. It will not beguile secular man by condescending indulgence of his self-idolatry as a means of luring him into membership with implied promises of status or prestige as though the church were a social club. The church will confidently proclaim the truth which it knows, that wherever men are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of Jesus Christ and the sinful mankind whom he came to redeem, there will one find genuine life. This is the scandal which is not removed; and "man come of age" still has untold numbers of the "rich young ruler" type. Still the church continues

Christ's mission of serving, reconciling, justing love. Still it bears the commission to announce the life-giving witness to the Word which calls the church into being, and which in its weakness is nevertheless the "mighty Word of God"--laying hold of whom it will among the hearers. Who will respond in faith and "join the church" is not the primary concern of the witnesses. The fidelity of the witness and the proclamation to as many as have ears to hear is of real importance.

Fellowship. Nothing has been said thus far in the proposal about the cultivation of fellowship. This is not intended to depreciate the significance of human fellowship. On the contrary, fellowship is the aspect of the "communion of the saints" which characterizes the being of the church as an "end in itself." On the other hand, Christians must learn that real fellowship or communion is a gift, and is not a human creation. To give a prominent place to the necessity to create a "friendly church" is to feed the human tendency to come before the brother with presuppositions about community which equate it with feelings of emotional harmony and the absence of tensions. This of course leads to unwritten codes about good behavior that do not allow Christians to be the sinners they are (even forgiven sinners).

On the other hand, the church cannot create community by a "group therapy" approach which turns the body in upon itself, probing after the "honest feelings" of members toward each other--even hostile ones. An experience of catharsis is not necessarily the experience of communion of the saints. In short, by pointing beyond herself to her

constitutive reality, Jesus Christ, and by following the biblical admonition to "seek first the Kingdom of God," the church discovers that God has added the gift of the bond of genuine fellowship which allows the brother to be who he really is, and sets his brother free to receive him as a unique gift.

It may be argued that the empirical church of the present "is not ready" for the exacting demands of this "model for the contemporary church." It might also be debated that to institute such strict disciplines upon church members would be imprudent and destructive to the institutional church. Although both points might be conceded as generalizations about the realities of the times, there is, nevertheless, considerable evidence that many people in many places are receptive to far more radical commitment than the church is equipped to demand or perhaps even to employ effectively. What is here pleaded for is a bold new image of what the church is and what, by the grace of God, the empirical church might become. Therefore, the proposal offered here may be seen as something of a working model by which empirical congregations may test their images and structures to see whether they are equipped to receive and to serve the new age of mankind which God has brought into being in the twentieth century.

Where this model fails to do adequate service to the image of the body of Christ, let it be modified. But where congregations of persons are ready to move out onto frontiers of humanness where the provincial parish structures are not equipped to go, let them have new structures appropriate to the time and place--not disdainful of previous times or older structures which served them well, but not

ensnared and limited by outmoded constructs as if they were normative. This is not a time for further fracturing of the body of Christ; it is an age of healing and reunion. This is not to plead for a new denomination in the name of greater fidelity to the gospel. Therefore, some proposals for implementing this model which will not be disruptive and divisive of empirical groupings are in order.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Clergy Colloquies

One way in which common theological ground may be established for the mission of the church in a given locale is for the clergy leadership to meet together in a common program for study and strategy. In their face-to-face meeting, they may seek ways of articulating doctrine comprehensible to contemporary man. In addition, they might address themselves to the problems of their own community to which the church ought to speak, and develop strategies for getting the church's word a hearing. The church will always have a stronger voice when she speaks with unanimity than when she is hopelessly divided within herself. But again, if such clergy conferences are to be more than just another "talk session" where persons commiserate with each other, then the study and strategy must be conducted with a view to active undertaking of the mission. The Chicago Ecumenical Institute seminars for clergy and for laity are designed to provide a basic theological orientation for laymen and a working "ecumenical vocabulary" and structural plans for clergy who would undertake a common mission to a

particular city. By conducting lay training which is supportive of the clergy colloquies,¹⁶ the clergymen then have a body of lay support and leadership upon which to draw for the larger task of awakening the whole church and spearheading the mission in the community at large.

What has been called for here is a broad ecumenical basis upon which to implement a model of the united People of God is mission to the contemporary society. Mere cooperative "societies" for social action projects are not adequate expressions of what it means to be the church, and yet organic union of all churches is far distant, if indeed it ever comes. In the meantime, to construct a new "Church-of-Renewal" would only fracture the body of Christ more and defeat many of the purposes it seeks to accomplish. Therefore, contemporary churchmen--clergy and laity--need to push aggressively for ecumenical interaction and strategizing that will maximize the common mission of Christians to embody and proclaim the gospel to the secular world. Such efforts have profound theological implications; thus, theological clarity should be a vital part of these ecumenical endeavors.

Finally, the initiative for the engagement of the renewed church with the world will have to be in large measure a "grassroots" effort because it is in concrete times and places that the call of Christ is heard, and it demands a response from those who are at hand and have ears to hear. Ecumenical involvement will not abolish the

¹⁶To account for the realities of scheduling, the lay seminars are conducted in intensive, forty-four hour week-end sessions, and the clergy colloquies during contiguous week-days (e.g., Monday through Thursday), since these are the times most open to laymen and clergy, respectively.

place of denominations--at least not immediately--but where good faith is shown within and among the denominations, even the denominational structures may be brought to bear to enhance rather than compete with the ecumenical effort.

B. Renewal of Structures from Within

It is almost cliché to mention the dismay with which most clergymen and lay leaders confront the proliferation of committees, conferences and other gatherings which seem to typify the life of most church congregations--especially if they try to be faithful to the many worthy emphases and challenges handed down by denominational leaders. The paper of William Steel, "A Functional View of the Church,"¹⁷ states this problem most forcefully. It is perhaps very little consolation to the harrassed churchman to point out that the ability to organize, to train leaders and to delegate responsibility for the church's affairs among its members is one of the geniuses of American Protestantism. Even to point out that this organizational and leadership training ability had its indirect but profound influence in society by furnishing able and sensitive leaders for secular roles may not assuage the feeling that the "bureaucracy" has outrun and perhaps outlived its usefulness. In all candor, the churches would be forced to admit that such over-organization does occur, and perhaps especially where there is centralized planning of programs and goals which are supposed to apply equally to any number

¹⁷Infra, Appendix A.

of congregations which may be radically different in composition and environmental setting.

Despite the acknowledgment that bureaucracy can and sometimes does become too weighty, even to the point of obstructing the mission, a more constructive approach to the problem should be sought than mere renunciation of the structures or the setting up of competing "streamlined" ones. The proposals in Steel's "The Skeleton Crew/Task Force Approach to Church Administration"¹⁸ face squarely the spirit of his denomination's organizational structures, but provide something of the ingenuity of the original framers of the structures by making them adaptable and effective in a local congregation. It needs to be admitted that there is a rationale behind the "organization manuals" of the churches' administration and polity, but concrete obedience to the call of Christ may require the flexibility to adapt the "administrative chart" to the local situation, and in extreme cases, even the calling into question of the relevance of certain particulars of the denomination's organization to a given situation.

To relate these organizational questions to the overall model for the contemporary church, imagination and flexibility are required. Most churches already have committees or other bodies who oversee the various functions of the church: altar guilds or worship committees to help ensure the smooth execution of the cultic life, education committees, social action groups, and missionary and evangelism

¹⁸Infra, Appendix B.

organizations. These structures could become the connecting link among ecumenically-comprised "cadres" of churchmen in any community where Christians would decide to unite their wisdom and resources in common mission to be the body of Christ in that place. The proposals offered by Steel both to fulfill denominational commitments and to reduce radically the amount of time and energy required for parochial concerns could be adapted to the corresponding structures in other denominations. Then, while ecumenical cadres go about the church's work in their geographic area (e.g., a common attack on an inner city problem, or the cultivation of "open housing" in a suburban community) they are not only fulfilling the intent of denominational "social action" structures, but they are expressing corporately--and in behalf of all--what it is to "be the church, existing for others." Complete unanimity on all fronts will not, of course, be achieved. But at every point they can, Christians must work together to continue Christ's work. And all the while, constructive dialogue may proceed among Christian bodies--hopefully weeding out insignificant differences and clarifying the more significant ones to see wherein a common understanding may be more nearly approximated.

C. Schools of Lay Theology

The model for the contemporary church proposed herein is built upon the premise that today's society is highly complex, urban-oriented, and technologically sophisticated. If the church and theology are to serve the times, they must be fully informed as to the character of the times, how Western civilization came to be the

way it now is, and what the Christian gospel has to say that will illuminate contemporary man's situation. This points to another underlying presupposition of the present study--born out of considerable firsthand experience in churches and extensive reading of analyses of church life--namely, that the so-called "average churchman" is simply not equipped to articulate either a coherent theological position or a comprehensive perspective of the cultural situation outside of his own field.

If the church is to enter effectively into the "revolutions" of the times, she must take rather drastic steps to close the gap in the theological and cultural awareness of her members. What is needed is not more of the "leadership training workshop" sessions which teach churchmen special techniques for turning the church in upon herself in greater bureaucratic and self-perpetuating skills. Nor can the church settle for study groups on social issues or theological and literary criticism that are divorced from an overall image of who the church is, how she is called to serve, and what such studies are intended to do that will enable the students more adequately to fulfill that service.

Again, the approach of the Ecumenical Institute is offered as a prototype for schools of lay theology that point to mission. These schools are taught by the Institute faculty, at the invitation and expense of a local sponsoring group. Unless underwriting funds are available, tuition of participants can be assessed to cover the cost. A localized ecumenical body is ideally suited to arrange for such a seminar and recruit participants on a broad ecumenical base. The

seminar covers a week-end from Friday dinner through Sunday luncheon, with residence at the seminar site obligatory.

Several courses are offered, but fundamental courses in basic Christian doctrines are prerequisite to participation in advanced courses or those in "cultural studies" which relate to the role of the man of faith in the secular revolutions of the times. The seminar is a comprehensive event which includes worship, lectures, group study, discussion, and response to art forms--visual and dramatic. The pedagogical method has been carefully prepared and is constantly tested and re-evaluated to ensure that each facet of the corporate experience contributes to the others, providing not only an analysis of, but participation in, the community which gathers to discover and to celebrate what it means to be the body of Christ.

To supplement the foundation courses for laymen and to provide sustaining local leadership, the Institute offers clergy colloquies with similar content but with more self-conscious focus upon pedagogy and method. The intent of these courses is to provide images and constructs for the creation of clergy cadres of persons who will assume the task of "teaching elders"--creating and sustaining additional cadres of laymen whom they will teach, and who will then become nuclei of alert and informed communities of men and women who are equipped to "point the way" in urban, secular society.

The acknowledgment made above should be reiterated here, that the Ecumenical Institute pattern is not the only valid one for lay theological education. But it has proved to be effective, and there are certain features of this approach that commend themselves with

special force. One is that education in the church should be related to the mission of the church and not simply an intellectual exercise--however fascinating it might be simply to cultivate "armchair theologians." Another is that every phase of the educational program should be seen in its relationship to the comprehensive picture of the life and mission of the church, and not piecemeal studies of faddish topics which do not relate to the life of the church as a whole. The imagery and metaphors employed to teach theology to laymen should be those which relate him to the present world and which will enable him to articulate intelligibly to his contemporaries. In general, the educational program should be one that is relevant to the real life of the participants, and not merely aimed at justifying hallowed concepts or ecclesiastical customs. And it must be realistically scheduled to account for the life-style and mobility patterns of those to whom it is addressed, not demanding the perpetuation of calendars and schedules of the rural past as though they were sacrosanct.

Such schools of lay theology are not ends in themselves, but if imaginatively organized and administered, they can become great enabling events whereby the church continues the witness with which it is entrusted and help equip its members to bear the Word to, and within, the secular order.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

"A FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH"

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PREFACE

No one knows what church renewal is, and no one knows what form it will take. Renewal of the church, like the renovation of any other individual or institution, is one of the unpredictable and uncontrollable events of our age; it would compare with the emerging nations in this respect. They suddenly appear, and that which has been in turbulence beneath the surface of events emerges in the form of a new people. Bang! Because of the widespread and diverse nature of the renewal movement, it might be more aptly compared to the population explosion. The population explosion does not occur all at once or in one place, but here and there and here and there and here and there and here and there new kinds of children are born. All are quite different; all are unrelated; together they constitute a new kind of world. Pop! Pop! Pop! So with church renewal.

In many places, born of differing concerns, and taking various forms, a turbulence moves beneath the surface of the Western Church. A part of the turbulence lies in the fact of numerically large churches with a relatively low level of commitment on the part of the membership. A part of the unrest is directly attributed to the gap between our understanding of the church's mission to the world and the fact of her conduct which is largely motivated by self-interest and self-concern. The quest for renewal comes from some who view her haphazard attendance patterns and her lackadaisical approach to

worship. In part, it is stimulated by those who deplore the sight of denominations competing with one another for members while seldom working together in common ministry. A large portion of unrest comes from those who feel that the church spends too much time in church and is too far removed from the arena of struggling, suffering humanity which she was called to serve. She has been too remote to become significantly involved in the crucial issues of human rights, the aging population, the hungry, the uneducated, the sick. The fact that we could spend a million dollars on a building to be used three hours each week is contrasted with the fact that Church hospitals are no longer operated for charity, but for profit. Our old age homes do not minister to the indigent, but to the affluent. Our token assistance toward the race issue in some areas is more than counter-balanced by the outright rejection of minority groups by many churches and many more "Christians" throughout the land. The Church, whose mission is to serve others, may spend eighty or ninety per cent of its income on its own premises. Out of these myriad concerns, some more appropriate in some places than others, but all characteristic of a widespread illness which flourishes in Western Christendom, emerge the lives and voices of renewal.

The voice of renewal is not aimed at renewing the church; its intention is to renew a vision, to recapture a dream, to restore a significance to Christian endeavour and to make new the world. When renewal occurs, it may be discovered that the renewal of the church occurs also, as a by-product of a new Christianity, intent on being God's servant people in the world.

What follows is an exposition on the theory and practice of renewal.

The voice of renewal is not aimed at renewing the church. We have a cosmopolitan task, and the task is to make the cosmos new. The newness is of character. It is a task of civilization, humaneness; it is a quest for justice, fair-mindedness; it is the pursuit of, and the sharing of, a new vision of mankind as significant and of new life as a precarious possibility. The intention is to renew a vision, to recapture a dream, to restore a significance to Christian endeavour. When the church engages itself with the renewal of mankind, the renewal of the church itself will have occurred.

Our task in the present must be seen as part of a continuing activity of humanization which has been in motion for centuries; the act of any group or individual may be, at best, only one of a series of "historical mutations" which will influence the character of history. This is, however, no cause for despair; it is a source of hope. Allies in the civilizing process are legion, and no period of history has been without them...nor will it be, until the goal of history is achieved.

Introduction

Frequently in the life of the church, as in most other institutions, there comes a hardening of the arteries, when the new blood of liveliness ceases to course through the organizational body. This has occurred in theology whenever we have systematized our liveliest discoveries into static doctrine. We must preserve the insight, but in the very systematization, the liveliness is lost.

Both ethics and worship provide good parallels for comparison. The law is a good illustration of a minimal decent response to life, but the observance of the letter of the law replaced the lively response itself. The liturgy of the church was, in one period of our history, a profound way to celebrate our intuitions about life: its essential holiness, judgemental character, and forgiving nature. Slowly the religious form became so encrusted with traditional acts and language that the uninterpreted liturgy became deadened with cliché. What was killed was the very clarity and spontaneity that the liturgy set out to preserve.

Throughout the Judeo-Christian heritage our liveliest visions have been systematized, catalogued, filed, and abandoned, over and over again. Only through the continuing reinterpretation and reexamination of both heritage and vision has the church produced epochs of history which might be called either faithful or productive. From the radical questions of the prophets and Jesus' insistence on the recovery of monotheism in Judaism through the contributions of Assisi, Luther, and Wesley, our lively epochs have been the outcome of our periods of self-examination and response to that examination.

In this essay I would like to explore a functional view of the Church which is based on: our history and leads to our purpose. I want to begin with an image of institutional insight, gleaned from "Think Magazine," the literary arm of I.B.M.: "The last act of a dying corporation is to issue an enlarged rule book." The contention is that when everything is done "by the book" the loss of creativity and spontaneity is irreparable. Since we Methodists are in the process

of issuing our largest rulebook in the history of the denomination, let's consider the state of the church. I confess that this is not a new concern, and that questions have been raised in my mind since the day that our newly organized Womens' Society (17 members total) was instructed to elect twenty-one officers. "Is it possible," I wondered, "that we are over-organized?"

I

In the infancy of the Christian movement in history, the church saw itself in terms of its mission; to speak in more contemporary terms, the church viewed itself functionally. It was to function in society as instructor of attitudes, servant of justice, healer of the needy spirit, and keeper of the vision of life. According to the New Testament, Christians were to think of themselves as functioning members of the same organism; as with the human organism, in which all members do not have the same function, members of the "body of Christ" saw that no member was without function; the body could not operate in completeness without the separate functions being fulfilled.

For the sake of the function, or for the sake of the mission, each member was given a designated task. Apostles were to organize new congregations. Bishops risked the responsibility of decisions; they also cared for the poor. Elders were appointed to the responsibility of teaching and they carried out a ministry to the sick. Prophets had the task of teaching and preaching. Evangelists were appointed to administer the discipline or to hold each man accountable for his assignment. Each person had a function that was directly

related to the mission of the Christian community. Because of their self-awareness, they held to their task, and this early band of our predecessors made a significant contribution to, and impact upon, their own times.

The functional view of the Church became blurred with the passing of time, and succeeding generations which inherited both the mission and the organization chart, found the latter easier to emulate than the former. Seeming to forget that the higher the office, the greater were the expectations for service, the organizational view of the church held (consciously or unconsciously) that an office was more than a responsibility. Offices became incentives or rewards for service, but when the office was filled, the new officer became primarily the officer and only secondarily the servant. On the whole, the functions of the body of Christ were carried out by non-officers, if they were carried out at all. Taking their cue from the officers, the non-officers tended to think more about the organization chart than about the functions of the church, and finally, in some instances at least, "who got the office" became more of a concern than whether the work got done.

The results of this pattern were tragic for the church of Jesus Christ, and wherever the pattern has been followed, the results have been the same. Inevitably, there has come on the heels of this institutional narcissism a corruption of the vision. The church has tended to see itself as end-in-itself, and to exist as church-for-the-sake-of-the-church, rather than for the sake of the mission. At more than one point in our history we have found that we were so busy

taxing, collecting and amassing buildings, arts and wealth that instead of the church's taking care of the poor, the poor were taking care of the church!

Non-conformists and heretics, both of the theological and institutional dogmas of the church, have seen the institution-oriented church move toward inquisition and witch-hunt. History has also witnessed reformation after reformation within the structures of Christendom, as Christians, aware of themselves and their mission, have struggled to be the Church that they professed to be.

II.

As a case-in-point, turn to the emergence of Methodism in the eighteenth century. The context for the Methodist movement was the Church of England. The Anglican Church had been born out of governmental edict. Its original function was the justification of a divorce. It was controlled by the British Parliament. From Roman Catholicism it received the organizational heritage of pre-Reformation days, but it did not receive any of the benefits of the counter-Reformation movement within Catholicism itself. Taken over by the crown, the Church was primarily institution-oriented, and the pageantry of the church attracted the institution-minded. This did not include the large majority of the citizenry. Theological pedantry and deadly institutionalism threatened to exclude the meaning and function of the church from Great Britain in the eighteenth century.

Enter John Wesley: heretic extraordinaire! Wesley was a man with a functional view of the Church. Our business was not to get the

world into the church; rather, it was to get the church into the world! In order to function as church, Wesley found it necessary to become a radical innovator, for the sake of the mission. People would not come to the cathedrals; therefore, the church went where people were. Into the streets went the early Methodists. Into the factories, into the fields, into the slums went a new breed of Christian men. To bridge the gap of biblical and theological ignorance, Methodist Societies were initiated for the purposes of serious study and self-discipline. To make up for the lack of ordained clergy willing to function as mission, rather than as institution, Wesley ordained lay preachers. To move beyond the conventional and institutionally "safe" cathedrals, the circuit riders were born. The new Wesleyan test of institutional orthodoxy was a pragmatic one: is the mission being carried out? If not, then it would become necessary to train Christians in the healing arts, to establish publishing houses, and to storm the American frontiers.

John Wesley and the early Methodists threw away the institutional rule-book and adopted a life-style, or a life-strategy based on the requirements necessitated by a functioning Church. They called this style of life their discipline, and the discipline was again pragmatic. That which was required for a functional Christian life or mission was included. All else was secondary. Thus minds were disciplined for the mission of teaching; time was organized to include the functions of preaching, healing, serving; finances were disciplined for the sake of the mission. The disciplined life was accepted because

only through self-discipline could the vision of the functioning body of Christ become reality.

The winsome picture of this small band of history-benders is accentuated when we consider the way in which history has been treated by their offspring. The Methodist movement which initially captured the lively vision of the Church, and generated a life style equal to the task; was followed by generations which, as in earlier days, found the discipline easier to capture than the vision. The Discipline was saved; the vision was abandoned.

In stark fact, it is not the "Vision" by which the Methodist Church is known; it is The Discipline. The Discipline, has in fact, become the mission, and in the institution-centered Methodism of today spontaneity and creativity are discouraged. The fact that almost every program of the church is geared toward the institution would not be so distressing if it were not clear that the church has become again end-in-itself--the goal rather than the tool or the means to the end. This is further emphasized when her ministers confide their discouragement that their most significant ventures must be done in secret, hidden from the institution lest ecclesiastical pressures of discouragement be applied. It is seen in patterns of significant and able members of the laity who eschew church office or are consistently delinquent in organizational chores because they chose to invest their time more dearly than in the game of "playing housekeeping" with Mother Church.

One hundred years ago the intense dissatisfaction sensed over our lack of function would surely have given birth to still another

of the myriad denominations which have fragmented the body of Christ through the years. Today, further fragmentation of this body is unthinkable. The ecumenical movement has taught us that we must move closer together rather than further apart. Rather, it lies within the capabilities of Methodism, because she is not divided by irremedial doctrinal allegiances and stalemate; and because of her heritage of radical innovation in the context of fidelity to function, to pioneer in new patterns that make the functioning church a possibility in the world of tumultuous alteration.

III

Let the church of today take full measure of her world; let her sense the dehumanization resulting from the escalating technology. Let her probe the meaning of the atom, the computer, the rocket engine. In all seriousness, let us see the full implications of the new vastness of our world which has been born out of the shrinking planet, the population explosion, the exploration of space, and the cosmopolitan mind-set. Let us make no easy evaluation of the insecurity of man's inner self in the light of emerging nations, world hunger, chaotic politics, and revolutions in vocational demands, leisure time and the arts.

When we know our world thoroughly, let us remember our function, as delivered in the infancy of our faith: to be the instructors, servants, healers, and vision-keepers of mankind. Then, and only then, let us begin to suggest possible answers (not timidly but tentatively) to the questions of the Age.

We should possess knowledge of our age and our function before we explore any new life-style or discipline for the church of the twentieth century; nevertheless, new disciplines, far different from any that we have inherited, suggest themselves from the age itself and from that heritage.

The housekeeping tasks, which have occupied an unwarranted portion of our time, can not be abandoned; they must become secondary. On a local church level, these tasks, which presently occupy (conservatively) 90% of the manhours expended by church members must be drastically reduced. Much of our work that presently involves many hours of committee and commission work could be handled either on the telephone or by an executive committee. The frequency of meetings could be reduced substantially through a working and efficient administrative council, made up of functioning officers who report on their sphere of responsibility. Committees and commissions should learn to operate intensely during the portion of the year when they have particular responsibilities, and the remainder of the year they should not meet.

Hopefully, by freeing up our already hectic calendar, members of the body of Christ could then become a functional part of a ministry that would move the Church beyond the church and get us beyond our busyness to the business of the people of God. As a mission or function-oriented congregation, rather than an institution-oriented community, the congregation could again seek out the challenges of the generation and become the lively act of God in response to the need of the day.

The world cannot be saved by study-groups, any more than by committee meetings; nevertheless, only the disciplined mind can determine the significant issues and grapple with them. Only the mind trained to think strategically will be able to deploy human capabilities effectively. A new sense of the ministry of the laity (in Luther's tradition of the priesthood of all believers) should be explored through small groups of sensitive Christian friends. Functioning groups with particular interests should be encouraged such as those found in many of our major cities with special ministries in fields of civil rights, alcoholics, the arts, and the night people. Our special insights into the value of human life and time must be cultivated and shared with those who have increasing amounts of leisure due to either retirement or automation. Our previously noted concerns for fair-mindedness, humaneness, and the holiness of life should characterize our new ministry to one another and to our world.

New disciplines would take the form of an attitude toward life, both within and without the structures of the church, rather than a structure of life geared to some other need or some other age. The new disciplines should include imagination, the discipline to look beyond what has been done to the art of the possible. Risk, experiment, and diversification are the key words. Diversification of our ministry, far beyond the standard preaching and worship, into the other structures of life must be considered a necessity in the church of tomorrow. As in Wesley's day, fewer and fewer people are finding themselves in tune with the forms and language of traditional Christianity. A new sense of vocation, the calling to invest life with

modern history at the most significant level must be the conscious life-style of the church of tomorrow. The kindling of significant personal relationships, possible only in the intimacy of small groups must somehow replace the mass-entertainment concept of present church meetings and worship services, where we stumble over one another's names and never sense one another's needs. Risk, experiment and diversification attack the problem, and they are indicative of a new approach for the church whose character is function.

Explorations in church-renewal are echoed across the land; they are varied in nature and in scope, the one thing they have in common is the conviction that nowhere is the church doing the job that it either should or must if it is to represent the real and significant thrust characteristic of the church in mission, functioning as the Body of Christ in an otherwise disjointed society.

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(1-28-65)

APPENDIX B

THE SKELETON CREW/TASK FORCE APPROACH
TO CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

THE SKELETON CREW/TASK FORCE APPROACH TO CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

A Response to the Challenge: Function!

Every church in Methodism has two mandates: serve the local congregation and serve the world. The former is the ministry to the people of the institution; the latter is the ministry by the people of the institution, functioning as the "deed" of Christ in the community. With few notable exceptions, most churches in Methodism perform only the former task as a church. Individuals are expected to carry out a Christian ethic in their personal lives, but this is the primary extra-institutional impact of the Church on our society. The condition of our society proclaims the feeble impact of this strategy and calls for a new look at our ministry to the world.

There appear to be three major reasons behind the Church's failure to penetrate the needs of the society. (1) The Church is not adequately familiar with the world to know the needs. (2) The Church has not developed a strategy to use the resources it possesses. (3) The Church is so involved taking care of its own needs that it has not time or energy to look beyond its own doors. In an attempt to raise the possibility of getting the church into the world, the following proposal is made.

I

All currently acknowledged obligations of the institution to the congregation must be continued. Worship, study, fellowship, and

service, through the already established vehicles of church services, Sunday School, Womens' Society, Lay Academy, and Commission ministries must be offered at the present level or higher. The tasks of building and maintenance, evangelism and membership assimilation, church finance, and the like permit us to attract and care for the persons in the congregation who then are called to be the Church-in-the-world.

These needs are adequately cared for by the present administrative structure of the Church, but that structure is seldom oriented to look beyond the institution which created it. Two major reasons for this condition may be attributed to a lack of self-understanding on the part of the church and a schedule of institutional meetings so busy that time precludes consideration of further activities or interests. No malice is imputed to the church at this point. We have simply failed to be conscious of the dimension of our task, and the schedule contributes to our failure. A more careful evaluation of goals, the establishment of priorities, and a more realistic procedure are called for.

II

Present institutional tasks of the church should be carried out as quickly and efficiently as possible. A "skeleton crew" could handle most of our present responsibilities. Meetings should be conducted when meetings are necessary, and not simply because it happens to be the first Monday of the month. Quarterly meetings or perhaps five meetings each year would allow us to make certain that all needs

are being met. With present responsibilities being handled through quarterly meetings, more time and talent would automatically be released for a ministry beyond the institution.

The Organization Chart would look like this:

The Official Board should be expanded to its maximum size (approximately fifty stewards, plus ex-officio members). Each member should agree (before election) to attend the four quarterly Review Sessions, in order to evaluate reports and proposals by the Commissions. In addition, each member should agree (before election) to participate in other projects or activities authorized by the Board during the year. These could relate to the Institution (as in a finance campaign or membership program of door-to-door calling) or they could relate to the community (as in a week-end mission to the inner-city or the beach). At any rate, a continuing series of challenges throughout the year would involve Board members in specific deeds. In this manner, we guarantee the Board Member that he will sit in only four "reporting sessions" as a representative of the congregation. We also provide a "resource pool" for service, which is the proper role of the Christian leader.

Commissions should feel free to meet as often as necessary in order to transact their business. All Commissions should meet at least Quarterly, however, to be absolutely certain that their responsibilities are being carried out. This should occur the month before the Board meets, in order that schedules not become too burdensome in any given month. Commissions should outline their work at the beginning of the year, through closely grouped meetings (e.g., weekly,

for a month) or through an all day session or retreat. At the conclusion of the year's planning, job responsibilities could be assigned for the remainder of the year. Commission members should move out from the Commission, like spokes from a wheel, to perform their assignments.

An Executive Committee, composed of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Trustees, Lay Leader, Pastoral Relations Committee Chairman, President, W.S.C.S., and representatives from all groups in the church should meet monthly to oversee the continuity of the organization. The monthly meeting of the small body reduces the number of manhours spent in listening to reports, but it insures the coordination of all phases of the church life would be viewed as to performance and satisfactory operation. Also, since each member of the Executive Committee is a functioning officer, each vote would represent a person who is abreast of the Church Life. Voting and questioning should, therefore, be characterized by insight and clarity. Each Commission should have a co-chairman to sit on the Executive Committee as an alternate delegate when the chairman must miss the meeting, and these co-chairman should attend meetings of the Official Board. The Executive Committee should act, only as authorized by the Official Board, and it should report in detail each time the Board convenes. The Executive Committee should have the authority to give tentative approval to "emergency or unforeseen" needs of Commission, between meetings of the Official Board. If a major change of policy should be involved, however, a special meeting of the Board should be called for evaluation and action.

III

Two things are necessary to make this system work. The first is intensive and thorough planning; the second is the development of the "Task Force." At the beginning of each year, Commission members should meet in extended session or retreat for the purpose of outlining the scope and nature of the year's work. A master calendar should be prepared in order for all task force and institutional activities to dovetail with a minimum of conflict. Definite goals should be documented, and areas of concern should be spelled out. The result of the planning session should be a written critique which would serve as the Commission handbook for the year. It should be reviewed quarterly, and actual versus proposed action should be noted. The Official Board, in its first meeting, should review these goals and determine priorities (or) name the specific goals which should be considered primary.

With Official Board approval, the Commissions should propose "Task Forces" to attack particular problems. The Task Force would be created by the Commissions to function in a particular area for a limited period of time. A Commission member might serve as Chairman of the task force, or a commission might request a member of the Board or Congregation to serve as Chairman. While the Task Force is in existence, the Chairman should report monthly to the Executive Committee. Personnel for the Task Force could be recruited from the Board, the Congregation, and from "experts" called in from the Community. Assigned to the task force are the responsibilities for

studying a particular problem, developing a strategy for action, and carrying out the mission in the community.

By documenting specific goals, both within the church and in the community, the Commissions serve as the "vision keepers" of the church. By setting up the task forces, they create the possibility of enactment of the visionary deed. Thus, whenever meetings are held, they are for the purpose of developing strategy or carrying out assignments. The time spent listening to factual reports and participating in uncontested votes is set at a minimum.

IV

Commissions, must, because of their differing natures, be treated individually, but the principle is that there is no need to have people gathered into meetings to assign routine jobs or to hear routine reports. When the commissions gather, they do so to suggest strategy, review, and evaluate.

If the Finance Commission has as its major function the contacting of new members, assignments could be made by phone calls from the commission chairman, on receiving the names from the Church Secretary. Quarterly meetings would adequately serve the need of the commission, except during periods of the finance campaign and the budget-planning sessions. Membership recruitment and assimilation could be handled in a similar fashion, and if the Membership Commission takes over sponsorship of the "Family clusters" the program could be administered in the same way. The central problem would be assigning new members to groups or forming new clusters from applications as

they arrive.

The Commission on Missions could meet intensely during the period of preparation for the School of Missions and the allocation of the benevolent budget, but Quarterly meetings for planning and strategy should suffice. It is possible that the Commission on Missions should be divided into two sections: one on home mission and the other on foreign missions. A continuing ministry of this group might involve the establishment of study groups both to understand and interpret the mission of the church to the congregation. The Task Force or other interested members of the congregation could be used for this approach and recommendations of strategy and procedure could be handed over for action to the Official Board. Likewise, the Commission on Social Concerns could divide its work among study groups recruited from the Board and the congregation. Several issues could be under consideration at one time. At present the Commission is too small to handle more than one issue at a time, and a larger group would be unwieldy. Further, there is no need for continuing year-in-year-out committees in most instances; within a quarter a study could be made, and within the next quarter, it could be acted upon.

It is possible that the Commission on Education would need to meet monthly in order to keep up with administrative problems in the Sunday School, though it is possible that these are better handled by Division Superintendants, within a policy framework established by the Commission. If so, then Education also could meet quarterly, except for special needs, to hear reports from Sunday School, Scout groups,

MYF, Lay Academy representatives, etc. The Quarterly meetings should also hold the possibility of a full Saturday devoted to special consideration of community needs or ways of improving the ministry of education to our congregation. Again, either commission personnel or especially interested or capable church members could be recruited on a short-term basis to assist in planning strategy. There is no reason why the Commission on Worship could not utilize the same pattern, using interested members of the Board and Congregation to develop studies on the worship procedures of the church. One or two persons could be assigned the responsibility of coordinating the music ministry with personnel of the staff. Trustees have already agreed to meet quarterly, and tasks have been assigned to each member; these are being coordinated by phone and this seems to have been not only accepted but appreciated by the Trustees of the church.

V

There appears to me to be several advantages to this approach to church administration. Almost every gathering under this system becomes either a strategy-session or an action session. Only four times a year are commission members or board members called upon to hear virtually uncontested reports, and minor business is transacted by phone without the necessity of calling the full group together to make individual assignments. Further, by a continuing series of challenges to planning and action in specific fields and for a limited duration, I believe that we will be able to involve new people more rapidly in the work of the church. We will also involve more people.

Most important, we will provide opportunities for many people to use special talents and capabilities in areas of their choice, in a way that is not presently possible. Many highly qualified people will not currently agree to sit on committees and commissions, because these entail a long-term commitment to a wide variety of matters outside their scope of interest or talent.

By expanding our base of operations to an enlarged Official Board, and by intense training of Commission members, we are building into the system the assurance of a continuity of leadership from one year to the next, and we are involving a larger number of men and women in the service of the church.

While the Commissions will not function with the regularity of the present system, both they and the task-forces (as well as the expanded Official Board) will continue to serve as a training ground for new people. In fact, through the continuing series of invitations to be a part of the "task force" operation, we should involve and train more new people than under the present system. A common meeting ground and source of fellowship should be adequately supplied through the work-projects, planning sessions, retreats, and Lay Academy program; family clusters should meet this need also. For any who seek it, fellowship will be available. There is no reason why commission membership should not carry over from one year to another, and new leadership should emerge from within the commissions, providing both depth and continuity. The checks and balances of the present system are maintained through Quarterly meetings of the Board, and, of course,

Commissions are free to meet as often as they feel necessary.

I feel that a move in this direction would permit us to do all the things which are presently done under our current schedule. It would not guarantee, but it would open up the possibility of expanding the interests of the church and diversifying the ministry of our congregation.

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